

Exploring the ‘God after God’ conversations in relation to God’s absence and presence

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DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I declare that the thesis entitled, “Exploring the 'God after God' conversations in relation to God's absence and presence” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation the author reflects on the absence and presence of God within Christianity. This is accomplished through engaging and seeking to understand key conversations following the Copernican Revolution and the-death-of God . The goal is to understand and model how it is that Christianity defines itself as a faith tied to knowing God and yet is appraised by many as a religion characterized by God's conspicuous silence, absence and death. These are 'God after God' conversations understood to include contributions from philosophers, Essentialists, and Christians following the-death-of God. With these 'God after God' conversations are tied to the institutional expression of Christianity and the diversification of and within religion during the modern era. It is with this in mind that the conjunction and disjunction between Christianity as religion, spirituality, and mysticism can perhaps enable a post-institutional expression of Christianity as the practice of the relational presence of God.

KEYWORDS

Christian Spirituality

Mysticism

Anatheism

Amnetheism

Anamnetheism

Worldviews

Religious diversification

Don Cupitt

Richard Kearney

John Caputo

GLOSSARY

Anatheism/anatheist/anatheistic

From *ana-* as in *after-* or *return-*, meaning the return of the question of God and the return to the conversation about God specifically after the-death-of God.

Amnetheism/Amnetheist/Amnetheistic

From the Greek word *amnesia* (Αμνησία), the forgetting of or loss of memories. This is used in the context of the anatheistic conversations as those leaning toward the forgetting of God as in the losing of or being done with the God who is silent, absent and perhaps dead in the sense of never having lived to begin with.

Anamnētheism/Anamnētheist/Anamnētheistic

From the Greek word *anamnēsis* (Ανάμνηση), the remembering of or recollection of what a memory that is forgotten. This is used in this context as the opposite of *amnesia*, in the sense of remembering the God who has been forgotten, the wanting to hear the voice of God again after it has been realized that God has ceased speaking, the company of God after it has been realized that God has left, seeking to join in the activity of God after realizing that we no longer see what God is doing.

Askesis

From the Greek word *askesis* (ἀσκησις), here understood as the practices, disciplines, and habits of the mystics addressing the heart and mind of the mystic through embodied relational practices.

Catholicism

The early Christian church or '*ekklesia*' (ἐκκλησία) is separated by worldview, geography and time from the post-Christendom expression thereof as Catholicism. In this dissertation we speak of Catholicism in the singular and as loose concept we can bundle Orthodoxy into. This is to gain a handle on the Orthodoxy as a constellation of paradigms, or worldview, and differentiate it for the purpose of reflection from Protestantism. It should not be taken to mean that Orthodoxy is in any way singular, centralized, or monolithic. Instead, it is a recognition that Catholicism is drawn together through a shared constellation of paradigms as foundationally Orthodox and yet practically distinct from Protestantism.

Constructivism

Here the work of Steven T. Katz and collaborators addressing concerns with early essentialism in light of continued research into mysticism related, perhaps primarily, to mystical texts.

The-death-of God

The argument that God is not only silent and absent but also dead in the sense of never having existed to begin with. The phrase is attributed to Nietzsche but it reflects the transition in world(view) from that of Christendom as a sacral age publicly defined as religious to modern society publicly defined as secular.

Essentialism

Here as 'Essentialism' is the later work of Robert K.C. Forman and collaborators and the 'early essentialism' (perennialism) reflecting early thinkers about the essential nature of the plurality of and within spirituality, religion and mysticism.

“Expérience”

The adoption of the French word “expérience” that blends together the English ‘experiment’ and ‘experience’. The idea being that expérience may produce data in relation to persons as simultaneously experimenter and experiment within the active participant.

Fideism

The faithful belief in God usually apart from experience and as subject to the formal and orthodox expression of Christianity.

Orthodoxy

Here Christian Orthodoxy is understood to precede Monasticism, Christendom and then comes to be expressed as Catholicism and Protestantism. To be “orthodox” is to agree on the fundamentals related to the Christian faith and is used here in a more expansive sense than, say, meaning the Oriental Orthodox Church or the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Protestantism

The early Christian church or '*ekklesia*' (ἐκκλησία) is separated by worldview, geography and time from the post-Christendom expression thereof as Protestantism. In this dissertation we speak of Protestantism in the singular as broad generalization. This enables us to incorporate the varieties denominations, movements, and independent churches without getting lost in the details. However, Protestantism is by no means singular or centralized and is instead drawn together through a shared

constellation of paradigms. Here we recognize that the collection of paradigms, or worldview, drawing Protestantism together is foundationally Orthodox and yet Protestantism is practically distinct from Catholicism.

Realism and non-realism

Here particularly focused on the ontology of God, meaning whether God is understood to be an idea or idea that one relates to or an apprehensible reality such as *Śūnyatā* (Emptiness) underlying the Cosmos or *Śeṣṭhā* (self-revealing Person). We thus seek to distinguish between the-idea-of God as internalized within individuals and institutionalized within the Church and the-reality-of God as Person engaged by people.

“Quies”

An inner place or state of quietness, stillness and solitude practiced by mystics-to-be and mystics. Here it is understood as internal state-place cultivated through practices (*askesis*).

Salāyatana

In *Theravāda Buddhism* Salayatana speaks of the six sense organs as sight, sound, touch, taste, smell and the mind. This is understood here as the internal reflection of our external senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) which includes the imagination and conceptual capabilities of the thinker (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, imagination). Here the internal senses mirror the external and play a role not only in the imaginative life of the individual but also in their capacity to intuit, apprehend and relate to the non-local and transcendent.

Śūnyatā

The Sanskrit *Śūnyatā* (Language: Sanskrit, meaning the Emptiness) along with *annata* (Language: Pali, also meaning Emptiness) and *suññata* (Language: Pali, also meaning Emptiness and the Pali word for the Sanskrit *Śūnyatā*) are used as interrelated concepts. They are borrowed from Buddhism and here abstracted for the purpose of the conversation. Here *Śūnyatā* refers to the Emptiness of Nature as the totality of the Cosmos or Space-Time continuum; *annata* is used to refer to the Emptiness of our world(view)s and religions and their conditional existence as human and evolving creations; and *suññata* to the Emptiness of our social and public self of the individual.

World(view)

Usually ‘world view’ or ‘worldview’ but here ‘world(view)’ as unifying era and worldview. This also draws a constant visual distinction between the world and our view of the world.

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Introduction

In this dissertation we explore presently occurring conversations that follow the-death-of God. These are conversations followed by an exploration of the question of God returning not on the basis of the conclusions of the-death-of God within modernity nor on the terms of the defence of the classical religious positions of Christian pre-dating the modern. The returning question instead proceeds with the understanding that following the Copernican Revolution that politics, philosophy and theology have become decidedly “modern” without being good conversation partners with each other. The returning question of God follows modernity and therewith the politics, philosophy and religion of modernity. Within modernity the validity of the Christian faith and the practice of Christianity were re-conceived after Christendom with the modern secular and religious world(view)s reflecting the-death-of God that had already taken place. The returning question of God returns on its own terms with the recognition that modern society, including the discrete activities of the secular and religious, is characterised by God’s absence. Here we explore the-death-of God conversations taking place within modern philosophy, the quest for what mysticism ‘is’ and modern Christianity. This brings us to an exploration, or thought experiment, as considering the question of God anew and afresh as moving on from the-death-of God.

This dissertation proceeds with the recognition of stepping into a conversation that has been going on for a long time and recognizing that we all will leave our lives before it is ever completed. This is not so much the conversation as covered in this dissertation but as a broader historical conversation that has already taken place over preceding centuries. What follows as a series of chapters exploring the problem of God’s absence and presence steps between the world(view)s of modernity and post-modernity with the researcher having a foot in each world(view). This is, then, a conversation that takes place between two co-existing world(view)s. The goal of the research is perhaps less to arrive at a conclusion than at an inconclusion. We arrive at our inconclusion through a series of chapters where we mostly grapple with the problem of God as having already taken place within Modernity as proceeding from the-death-of God. Yet we aim to understand the returning question of God after Modernity as also after the Christianity of Modernity. For the returning question of God is one that arrives afresh “after” Modernity as both after the-death-of God and after the Christianity of Modernity.

List 1 Overview of the dissertation:

- 1.1 In **Chapter 1: Introduction**, we introduce the research and provide a brief outline of the chapters to follow.
- 1.2 In **Chapter 2: Research methodology**, we consider modelling and reflection as methodologies drawn together to explore God's absence in modern philosophy, mysticism and Christianity.
- 1.3 In Chapters 4-6 we explore the 'God after God' conversations that take place within the modern Era as preceding *anatheism* as itself a 'God after God' conversations that follows the modern Era. In **Chapter 3: modern philosophy**, we explore world(view)s and their conditionalism to arrive at the Western agreement with the Eastern on Emptiness and objective non-realism of God. In **Chapter 4: modern mysticism**, we explore the quest for what mysticism 'is' as beginning with an early essentialism, which is countered by Constructivism, and then deepened by the contributions of recent Essentialism. And in **Chapter 5: modern Christianity**, we explore modern Christianity as a conditional world(view) now hosted by the world(view) of Modernity. And therein Christianity largely agrees in practice with modern philosophy and with Essentialism. These chapters provide an overview of the conversations appraising Christianity as a faith wherein God is silent, absent and dead in the sense of never having existed to begin with. To this we add a modelling of consecutive western world(view)s leading to the world(view) of Christendom. It is from this world(view) that both the modern world(view) and the Christian world(view) emerge. Christianity continues after Christendom as now Catholicism and Protestantism. We make use of the broadest understanding possible of Catholicism as the institutional church preceding the modern era and descended there-from; and for Protestantism as all modern churches stemming from the Reformation and descending from the foundation there-from.
- 1.4 In **Chapter 6: Anamnetheism**, we engage in a 'thought experiment' building on the understanding of world(view)s and their conditionalism toward a post-Essentialism that incorporates the Emptiness of society, religion, self and the Cosmos and Self-revelation of God. Here there is an anatheistic exploration nuancing Christianity as spirituality, religion and mysticism in light of the conjunctions and disjunctions. The focus is on the conjunction and disjunction as a deconstruction that serves as retrieval enabling a repetition of engagement with the relational presence of God and Emptiness.
- 1.5 In **Chapter 7: Inconclusion**, we draw the dissertation to a close as seeking to further conversation. There is perhaps an opportunity to redefine Christianity anew after the Christianity of Modernity for those seeking to be in relation with God without having to choose between atheism or the traditional or modern expressions of Christianity.

Research methodology and considerations

At the heart of this dissertation lies an elusive problem perhaps enhanced rather than resolved here. In its simplest form this dissertation is a conversation about God with others conversing about God. The curious absence and presence of God is explored through the ‘God after God’ conversations and contextualised against a broader institutionalised Christian faith that is ostensibly all about knowing God yet wherein God is found to be curiously and conspicuously absent. It is therefore rightly situated within the field of Christian Spirituality. Yet it is a learned reflection that is part theology, part philosophy, and part mysticism.

This dissertation is, no doubt, a flawed product. It is perhaps more conversation and reflection than argument for or against established positions and views. It is also, most assuredly, informed by the author’s personal biases. But perhaps the return to models and world(view)s will provide a suitable hermeneutic enabling fruitful conversation of the ‘God after God’ conversations.

2.1 METHODOLOGY

This research is informed by a number of research methodologies such as *participant-observation* and *grounded research methodology* but it is mostly an informed conversation and reflection of an individual in the process of understanding *anatheism*. Here a complex set of diverse conversations and reflections related to God’s absence and presence are drawn together explored and their relationships less mapped and modelled for others than as seeking an understanding for myself. This dissertation has been to gain further clarity and simplicity on a complex problem.

2.1.1 USE OF SOURCES

The use of sources has varied in this research with some going back years and others only recently published or discovered. Somewhere along the way some thoughts and concepts have become my own or better reflected my own. I have done my best to cite sources where needed or italicise perhaps unfamiliar concepts. There is a fluidity to language and perhaps even a poetic and artistic weaving of philosophical concepts in the discussions of many of the authors engaged with here. Perhaps this dissertation reflects that in places but as a learner their conceptual fluency certainly invites and merits continued reading and engagement. As reflection I often work with rather than explaining their thinking.

Sources have also been diverse including sources not usually respected (such as *YouTube* and *Wikipedia*) and those well respected (such as published and peer reviewed articles to greater works). YouTube references are provided in a footnote as a URL as are web pages. As such, this conversation stands between two kinds of conversations. One is strict and academic and requires more precision and the other colloquial and imprecise. Sources have included published, to-be-published and unpublished works, works published in print and digitally, and no small number of conversations over years along with my own work reflections.

In working between print publications and PDFs reflecting print publications, references to authors are provided as “author date: page”. As e-books report the position one is in the text differently there is yet no easy means of establishing a rock solid convention. In some cases a quote or reference from e-book is cited as “author date: %”, in others as “author date: loc.nnnn”, or “author date: loc.nnnn/nnnn”. This is because Amazon Kindle reports the position in the e-book variously depending on the publication.

2.1.2 PARTICIPANT-OBSERVATION

The author has long wrestled with and participated in Christianity. This reflection in this dissertation is as participant-observer in various ways over nearly thirty years.

List 2.1.2 My Church participation

- 2.1.2.1. Early exposure to church.** My first exposure to Christianity was through the Methodist Church and Dutch Reformed Church through a family that visited church occasionally. This was followed by missionaries from the Assemblies of God through my much older brothers and later a friend who got “born again” and baptised. It was at that friend’s baptism that I first experienced a ‘glimpse’ of God’s attention, like becoming aware of someone watching you that you catch in the corner of your eye but who is lost to you when you look for them in a crowd.
- 2.1.2.2. Mystical experience.** In 1988, at the age of twelve, the author had their first ‘originating theistic experience’ or ‘mystical experience’. This was followed by a number of similar yet unique experiences/phenomena perhaps better describe as ‘waking dreams’ and ‘sleeping visions’. In 1991, the author experienced a visionary-mystical encounter with Jesus as risen Lord, quickly followed by phenomena such as one reads about the New Testament and now commonly referred to as prophecy, healing and deliverance. And it is here that I first experienced tension between experiencing God as active and present and having to have faith in God apart from such. Here the religious around me argued for “faith” as distinct from experience and coupled with the notion that such experiences could not be trusted and should not be sought. This tension has

been a feature of my church experience ever since. Yet such experience has enabled a nuancing of God's presence, voice and activity in quality, duration, intensity and on who initiated and who responded. It has also resulted in no small amount of tension between the aims and goals of the institutional churches in offering regular and set services and activities and the apprehended and often disruptive activities of God as present in Person to speak and act.

2.1.2.3. Time in the ministry. In 1993 God encouraged me to study theology and over the years of 1994-1996 I completed my undergraduate studies in theology. From 1996 onwards I worked as youth pastor (arguably the world's worst); lectured theology at a local church Bible school; was the speaker at Alpha Courses; helped run a national worship festival the *Newsong Festival*; and was heavily involved in a church specifically aimed at reaching post-modern young adults who usually left church as school leavers only to return after their mid-life crisis. During the years of 2001-2006 I was supported by a collection of individuals and two churches to work as a freelance urban missionary mostly with New Agers and church leavers. Here I defined my urban missionary led around a missional-mystic framework referred to in the Vineyard vernacular as "doing the stuff that Jesus did" as in words of knowledge, physical and emotional healing, driving out demons, and bringing people into reconciliation with God. This led to a curious and growing conflict between me pushing more for the relational presence of God in such missional activities and arguing for such in the church and its services while churches pushed back. The Vineyard Movement proved a curious middle ground that included such but I never quite understood why this was not working for me.

Having run a number of Alpha Courses I was convinced that it worked well for those who came from a Christian background but not for those more pluralistically oriented. My missional-mystic framework included a number of activities, talks, seminars and series I produced and offered such as: *The problem of God*, *The seven key relationships* and *The trinity sessions*, hosted regular weekly open-ended small groups, and a monthly stall at the Holistic Lifestyle Fair offering 'open channeling' for free to spiritual seekers and explorers. I understood that Christians had a need to evangelize but communicated poorly with others. And that (1) people had a need for a relational engagement with God but that (2) Christians put forward blockers related to beliefs and behaviour without enabling an opportunity to meet with God. The missional-mystical framework held as its highest priority the presence and activity of God and placed such as first and primary. Many who had deconverted from Christianity because they were raised to believe in a God they did not experience or whose life experienced shattered their belief in God returned on the basis of experience God immediately present to

them. My missional-mystical strategy included such converts and reconverts landing in established and healthy churches. I naively believed that addressing their lack of experience was sufficient. However, a deeper problem emerged with many returning to me six months to a year later to argue that doing church was not about relating to God. Though I had found an approach and strategy that worked, the deeper problem appeared to be related to church. But I did not quite understand my and their frustrations with church. I knew that I needed to find a new way of doing church, but struggled to conceive of what that ‘new way’ could be and even if I could make that my work.

Struggling to conceive of what to do as a viable, practical and meaningful alternative to church I decided that deconstructing and gaining distance and perspective over time was needed. I needed to deconstruct the paradigm of the church that makes the church and not the relational presence of God central. I had the privilege in 2006 of taking a six month sabbatical and settled on resigning from ministry and left the church, seeing it as an institutional approach to gathering people to meet *about* but not *with* God and not knowing what to do as an alternative. Since then I have been post-Church, which included a ten-year period of having almost nothing to do with the church while changing fields and careers several times. Soon after I helped start an ‘emerging church’ and left over similar frustrations related to the relational presence of God. There are many ‘new approaches’ to church that are relational and though perhaps contextually relevant they continue meeting *about* God in new ways. I then contributed toward the *Divine Feminine Version of the New Testament*¹ which resulted in no small amount of tension and controversy with many people that I knew. There again I noted a tension between (1) people looking to find God as having left Christianity and as not ever wanting to become a Christian and (2) Christians fighting against them using a narrow language and view of God that completely inhibited their process.

2.1.2.4. Mystical re-calling. In 2016 I had another intensive visionary-mystical experience of God, encouraging me to formally study further and to return to work as a freelance urban missionary. Since then I have been running *Urban Mystic*, a venture toward reaching post-modern spiritual seekers and church refugees. We have run *The seven key relationships* and *The trinity sessions* and experimented with intentional monthly meeting with people and encouraging people to live deeply into their relationships in pursuit of friendship, companionship and intimacy with God. It is from this perspective that I now seek to engage deeply and responsibly with the returning question of God as a consideration of what Christian ‘is’ after Modernity and after the Christianity of Modernity.

1 <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/27579745-the-divine-feminine-version-of-the-new-testament>

2.1.3 PHENOMENOLOGY

This dissertation touches on originating theistic experience as a present-continuous experience as relational engagement with God. It recognizes that there is (1) a real and literal understanding of God of God as a transcendent Person and (2) a non-real understanding where the relationship is real for the individual with enough faith but God is not real. Here God is understood as a real Person whether available to experience or held to by faith alone to the former. Yet God is not understood as such by the latter and, perhaps, the notion of faith prohibits both from seeking precisely such experiences to explore. In each case the relationship is real, but the object of the former is understood as a literal Person only available by faith and not experience and the latter as a non-literal idea who can never be experienced as a Person.

Yet, despite this distinction, the belief in the former or the latter does not determine whether God is a Person or an idea or neither. In fact, the idea of God may even well match the Person of God. This is the deep epistemological problem raised in modern philosophy that is not solved in Christendom's reliance on metaphysics or Christianity's relying on rationalism. In each case, the problem of God is reinforced by the silence and absence of God in the modern world(view) and Christianity being attached to the formal church and faith distinguished by modern Christianity from experience. The questions one would ask from an empirical concern related to the phenomenon of "knowing" God are of vital importance. Exploring such epistemological concerns is, however, not the focus of this research. Instead we seek to understand how the absence of God in Christianity is understood in modern philosophy, mysticism and Christianity.

We here delve into the spaces of and between 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'mysticism'. We assume each as specific ideas, activities and fields of research that overlap and mutually inform us about something deeper they touch on. Here 'spirituality' is understood as a characteristic of the individual related to their values and behaviour and somewhat individual, personal and private; "religion" as socially constructed institutions and their intellectual and historical accruals within a world(view) that become the established norms and assumptions about God and life over consecutive and evolving world(view)s; and "mysticism" as concerning our relational connection and means of cultivating connection with ourselves, others, and the transcendent as impersonal and personal.

Mysticism involves our apprehension of the transcendent as *impersonal* as the deep ontological Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) to the Cosmos, world(view)s and people; and the transcendent as *personal* as self-revealing and manifesting in the Cosmos relationally to people (*Śekîṇā*). *Śūnyatā* is perhaps our deeper apprehension of the space-time continuum, all human society and structures as conditional and empty including our religions, and even our very selves as understood in and through religion and society; *Śekîṇā* is our apprehension of the personal transcendent as self-revealing Person breaking in from beyond *Śūnyatā*. The former term is borrowed from Buddhism and the latter from Judaism.

2.1.4 MODELLING

Models are used in research, academics and business and though theoretical prove themselves incredibly useful practically. Models have been used to understand changing paradigms within what is now the field of science, as done by Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970); to understand trajectories and positions in complex debates with differing avenues of research, such as those related to the doctrine of revelation as explored by Dulles in *Models of Revelation* (1992), to understand and map various religious world(view)s, as done somewhat selectively by Wink in *Engaging the Powers* (1992) in support of a Christian world(view) and more complexly by Krüger in *Signposts to Spirituality* (2018) as engaging deeply with the pluralism of and within religion; and even to understand the inner drives and motivations of individuals such as the alternative believer in relation to their world and the faiths, such as Steyn's ideal type of New Ager in *Worldviews in transition* (1995); and there is literally tons of examples in the business world with regards to business operating models and strategies as approaches to organizing and conducting business ventures producing, transporting and selling products and services. This dissertation offers models of world(view)s and prototypes a mysticism 'after' modernity as incorporating *Śūnyatā* and *Śekīnā*.

The basic functions of modelling, as developed in this dissertation in relation to an historical western faith, are for the creative exploration of the 'God after God' conversations toward the recollection of relational engagement with God. The idea is to develop a model or prototype enabling a quick and fair organization of concepts related to 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'mysticism'. Such a model enables us to draw together phenomena such as *Śūnyatā* and *Śekīnā* without having subscribe to an earlier and historical religion that understood the world vastly differently to the way we do today.

We moved from a 'pre-modern era' to a 'modern era' and are moving toward a 'post-modern era', what Caputo (2001:38) calls the "sacral", "secular: and "post-secular". At the core of this transition, according to Perel², is a transition from the pre-modern to the contemporary is a change in our model of relationships and therewith our models of spirituality. The term 'modern' is no longer a term of admiration or a synonym for 'contemporary' but rather laden with derogatory implications in much the same manner that 'pre-modern'. Modernity is now regarded as a worldview, according to Steyn (1995:7), "which has developed from people's infatuation with science, characterised by rationalism, individualism, materialism and secularism." Modernity has failed to satisfy the deepest needs of humanity. Some circles believe that humanity must "transcend modernity and enter into a post-modern world in which the destructive features of the modern world will be left behind" (Stein 1995: 7). Postmodernism emphasizes communalism, global awareness, religious tolerance, feminism and anti-materialism with "... many of the tenets of constructive post-modern though and those of the New Age movement" shared and the "new age movement ... viewed as a post-modern phenomenon in itself" (Stein 1995: 8). Yet the simplicity of the change is from (1) our pre-modern

2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iu9_8Vsmtk

or sacral world(view) taking care of all our beliefs and offering eternal securities in exchange for faith and obedience and (2) our post-modern and post-secular world(view) being one wherein the individual is solely responsible for all their beliefs and the outcomes of their living and loving without the social provision of certainty and security.

Our world(view) provides us its model questions and answers in relation to everything, including ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’. Being sensitive to how world(view)s work helps when experiencing something that is not well explained or escapes what is familiar – such as mystical experience of *Śūnyatā* and *Śekîṇâ*. Making use of models is important.

List 2.1.4 Functions of a model:

- 2.1.4.1 **Gain clarity.** Models enable us to understand the complex relationships within cultures, philosophies, traditions, religions. They are at once simple and yet clearly communicate. Models help us gain perspective on broad and complex issues and phenomena and help us understand them for what they are. They help us develop a working picture of problems, process and phenomena that can be hard to define or can be understood from multiple perspectives. It is also helpful to develop a model when a problem cannot be reduced to a single explanation, when motivations cannot be clearly identified or when ideas are developing in steps over time without being static. The relationship between ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’ is easier to understand when modelled than when we are wrestling with epistemological concerns alone. Here we generate profiles of what a world(view) is, of Christianity as a world(view), and of a mysticism after modernity and Christianity incorporating *Śūnyatā* and *Śekîṇâ*.
- 2.1.4.2 **Ask questions.** As people we ask questions from our own perspectives as including our own area of expertise. Yet there are questions that can emerge when modelling that would not necessarily occur to us. This is because our world(view) provides a point of departure, focus and prepared questions and answers. By developing a model of world(view)s and mysticism we are able to ask contextualize questions and the answers given to them. This helps us recognize that earlier world(view)s do not ask or answer our questions and so we must fairly question and listen. It also enables us to understand that politics, philosophy, science and religion all develop over time and that the relationship between each is itself in constant process.
- 2.1.4.3 **Develop a contextual hermeneutic.** Modelling enables a contextual hermeneutic where we fairly address earlier world(view)s even though our knowledge thereof is imperfect and the details escape us. This enables us to allow the texts of earlier world(view)s to be read as situated in that world(view) rather than ours. It also helps us understand that some questions posed by one world(view) may never be answered by another and yet while others are answered in different ways in various world(view)s. This encourages

us to allow for nuanced answers and non-answers when exploring ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’. We therefore consider what a world(view) ‘is’ here; model the modern world(view) in **Chapter 3: modern Philosophy** ahead of discussing the death-of God and conditionalism; note the three quests for what mysticism ‘is’ in the modern era in **Chapter 4: modern mysticism** and model Essentialism; model the Christian world(view) and discuss modern Christian rationalism as the metaphysics of Christendom in translation in **Chapter 5: modern Christianity**; which enables an exploration of the returning question of God alongside these ‘God after God’ conversations albeit in a new and post-secular or post-modern way than secular or modern in **Chapter 6: *anamnētheism***.³ To cover God-absence over such a long period of time requires modelling as the scope of potential conversation is immense.

- 2.1.4.4 **Explore conjunctions and disjunctions.** Modelling enables primary issues to be recognized in their appropriate hermeneutic context, such as the discussions of Christian rationalism in relation to Christian doctrines of the church and revelation or the discussion of the-death-of God and conditionalism in relation to modern philosophy. Yet, somehow, these may be drawn together in exploring an *anamnētheistic* model incorporating *Śūnyatā* and *Śekīnā*. It is here that we can recognise various conjunctions and disjunctions such as: Christianity as a world(view) to the modern world(view) with both continuing and overlapping and continuing the earlier world(view) of Christendom; or of the conjunction and disjunction of the relational presence of God in the thinking of the believer and mystic whether in modern Christianity or Christendom; and of the conjunction between the Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) in the thinking of the modern philosopher as supported by Christian rationalism and Buddhist philosophers and the disjunction between each and the Christian mystic and mystic-want-to-be around the relational presence of God (*Śekīnā*).

2.2 CONSIDERATIONS

2.2.1 APPROACH

The research is approached as a conversation and reflection rather than as an argument or explanation. It is as a learner seeking to understand rather than as one who holds a position seeking to argue it or one who understands the thinking of a great thinker seeking to explain or elaborate upon it. It is

3 The Greek word “*anamnēsis*” is taken here to mean “recovery” or “recollection in the sense of remembering that something has been forgotten and now we are trying to remember them; that someone was speaking and has fallen silent and now we want to hear their voice again; that someone who was present has left us and we are walking around trying to find their company again.

a preliminary attempt at modelling conversations that have been in play for a long time. And as it covers a narrow set of ‘God after God’ conversations that take place in relation to a long period of time where people have lived in and understood their world in entirely different ways we begin with an exploration of world(view)s. Here modelling is vital in gaining perspective on complexities such as the significant shifts in society related to modernization and postmodernisation. These are not easily tied to singular events but instead to processes with a pre-history and post-history.

This work is perhaps also a bit confessional in the similar sense to which Krüger’s, Forman’s, Caputo’s, Cupitt’s and Kearney’s are. By this I mean that my thinking and research is personal and yet my own beliefs and experiences are not made into the subject of the research. The work of Krüger in *Signposts to Silence* (2018) and Komjathy in *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (2018) “represents a paradigm shift, a new model for research and education” (Komjathy 2018:13) that’s critical, subjective, contextual, relativistic and confessional.⁴ Here there is a confessionalism steeped in academics that shifts the conversation from being ‘about’ religion to ‘concerning people and their relationships’. There is an insight into spirituality as contemplation and mysticism as related to both the individual and the transcendent after secularism and the Christian religion. Authors such as Komjathy, Krüger, Forman, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, Caputo, Cupitt, Kearney, etc. are both confessional and insightful contributors. This researcher attempts to follow similarly and is deeply aware of having stepped into larger conversations that are well established, such as between Constructivists and Essentialists. These contributors all write as standing within a broad paradigm change taking place within our society. They write in recent history around recent developments in our thinking about ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’, and ‘mysticism’. But what is a world(view) and what do world(view)s do?

2.2.2 WORLD(VIEW) S

Modelling world(view)s helps us understand the ‘God after God’ conversations related to God’s absence and relational presence. In one sense there is no difference between the world we live in and the world as we understand it. Yet, in another sense, we do not see the world that is but instead understand the world to be as we see it. It is in this sense that I use the word ‘world(view)’ as incorporating ‘the world’ and ‘our shared view of the world’.

In the most basic sense, there is no distinction between the environment as the world we live in, the environment as the world we see, our understanding and explanation of the environment as pertaining to the world, and the perspective, world and experiences of those we live with in community. We can simply assume that we see the world that is as it is and as we and others around us know it to be. Humans are social beings, and we share a common society upon a single world, yet different societies

⁴ Krüger’s and Komjathy’s works arrived late in this research and, though included, bring so many trajectories together that have not been explored here.

see the world in very different ways. But, as the reader well knows, the notion of ‘experience’ and ‘worldview’ are much more complicated than that in that we are schooled into our language, behaviour, means of making a living, and our faiths. And so, through a process we acquire a worldview and come to inhabit and perceive the world through our worldview. We may then speak of a small geographic portion of the world and the people who live there for a time as sharing both the world and their view of the world. We may then speak of a world(view) in the singular as that of a particular individual and community, however large or small, and of world(view)s in the plural with respect to large groups and sub-groups whose historical periods and geographic terrain may overlap.

Kuhn, in *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1970), explores how it is that two people standing right next to each other to look at a scene should receive approximately the same stimuli. But people don’t see stimuli and instead the world they know and what they know about the world is highly abstract (Kuhn 1970:192). The same stimuli can produce different sensations and the same sensations may arise from different stimuli. The route from stimuli to sensation is conditioned and layered by education (Kuhn 1970:193), participation and attention. The result is that two different people standing right next to each other, could ‘experience’ the world in an entirely different way and have entirely different views on the world. And it is this that leads Barbour to write *Issues in science and religion* (1966), Frankenberry to write *Religion and radical empiricism* (1987), and Caputo to dig through the problems with empiricism to get at what it is that people of faith are speaking of when speaking about God such as in *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (1987), *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (1997), *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (2013), and *Hermeneutics: Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information* (2018).⁵ Over this period, the exploration of ‘experience’ has been recognised as a modern construction, that is of a particular worldview ill-suited to exploring theistic experience. And it is this recognition of world(view)s that we rely on when exploring the ‘God after God’ conversations. What is built into the neural process that transforms stimuli into sensations has numerous characteristics (Kuhn 1970:196) and therewith there is a pedagogy to neural processes, meaning that people are educated into and by their world(view).

List 2.2.2.1 Pedagogic neural processes

- 2.2.2.1.1 World(view)s are transmitted through education (Kuhn 1970:196).
- 2.2.2.1.2. World(view)s develop by trial and error and those that endure prove more effective than its historical competitors in a group’s current environment (Kuhn 1970:196).
- 2.2.2.1.3. World(view)s are subject to change both through further education and through the discovery of new paradigms with the environment (Kuhn 1970:196), such as stimuli unsuitably resolved in the paradigm.

As world(view)s are shared, we may think of them as collective paradigms containing paradigms.

⁵ This is not intended as a detailed list of citations and merely illustrative.

List 2.2.2.2 World(view)s as paradigms

- 2.2.2.2.1. ‘Paradigm’ may stand for the entire *constellation* of beliefs, values, techniques, contributions, etc. shared by members of a given community (Kuhn 1970:175) as well as what that community excludes. We use the concept in this sense as world(view) as recognised academic fields whether in the natural sciences or humanities as well as of boundaried social groups and sub-groups. We also make use of ‘paradigm’ in this sense when speaking of the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) and Modernity as a world(view).
- 2.2.2.2.2. ‘Paradigm’ may denote one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete *puzzle-solutions* which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles (Kuhn 1970:175). We will later do exactly this, when reflecting on Christianity as a faith that is a paradigm or world(view) and with the church and *doing church* as paradigm central to Christianity as a religion and being a Christian.

When speaking about the postmodern philosophers, Essentialists, Constructivists, Christians as Catholic and Protestant, we are working with people who share a theory or set of theories with each other and yet live in and interpret the world in different ways to their neighbours. We understand this and it perhaps does not need to be argued here, but the implications need to be held in mind when reading this dissertation. A ‘paradigm’ in this sense governs not the subject matter in question but rather a group of practitioners, and therefore it cannot be assumed that the world(view) of the reader is shared with the author or even that the same issues and concerns matter to each.

In light of the above, we need to consider that our secular world(view) is in constant dialogue with our premodern religious world(view)s and that such dialogue is no longer predominantly a Christian concern. It is now pluralistic. Here our faiths are in constant dialogue among themselves, with each other, and with modernity. And as each world(view) converges, a new world(view) is emerging that is post with regards to modernity, nationalism, secularism and religion. And yet, within this world(view) that is “post” with respect to religion, that the question of God returns within the context of the ‘God after God’ conversations.

Here there is a fundamental difference between the natural sciences and the humanities in that where the former rely on instrumentations that put forth certain values that the latter relies on persons who constantly provide indeterminate values. Kuhn (1970:198) uses the example of an ammeter, which a professional makes use of when measuring current. The layman may readily see the value, but must be schooled into making use of the instrument and interpreting the value. The very concepts and application that have become unconscious to the professional must be taught, acquired and practiced by the laymen in order to make proper use of the instrument. In particular, there are two different

process related to the measuring and interpretation of the value. Here the perception of both may be the same when looking at the number on the ammeter, but their respective interpretation depends on their prior experience, training and application.

This is particularly relevant in this dissertation as, for example, how one makes use of and interprets religious activities such as the Eucharist for Catholics and the Message for Protestants. In both cases the particular visible, invisible and theodramatic stimuli are evident. Here the real presence of God is of immense and central importance to the Catholic in the Eucharist, less so to the Protestant and absurd to the atheist. Similarly, the real presence of God in the Message is primary for the Protestant, secondary for the Catholic and, again, absurd to the atheist. The 'real presence of God' is not evident and of prime importance to the Protestant because they have not been schooled into such, and perhaps have been somewhat schooled into the absurdity of such. But it is blatantly absurd to the atheist who has been schooled precisely into such and often because of attempts at schooling them into such. Similarly for the Message, with the Catholic schooled somewhat against such and a little into the absurdity of such, while the atheist has clearly been schooled into the totally absurdity of such also and often in part by being schooled into such. In each case, their respective world(view)s as Catholic, Protestant and atheist interpret the sense stimuli.⁶

The study of 'spirituality', 'religion', and 'mysticism' also differs from the natural sciences in being concerned with the realm of personal selfhood. The distinctive nature of 'ultimate commitment' and 'religious commitment' and its perception differs from speculative works of natural philosophy and theology (Barbour 1966:207). Here we are looking into the Transcendent as impersonal in the Buddhocentric and Christian faiths while also trying to explore the transcendent personal in the Christocentric faiths. And though there is overlap between the two in the commonality of persons being involved in both, and though they both make use of introspective practices and highlight introvertive experiences coupled with character transformation toward the likeness of the Buddha and Christ, each lives in different world(view)s.

As such, Barbour (1966:214) notes that religious communities share a language for describing their common experience. Such language may convey little to those who have not participated in the life of the community even as it may clearly orientate one who has. Such language may also as easily school a learner into the faith as school someone out of it as it may sound completely absurd to someone listening in as outsider.

The 'God after God' conversations are a tremendously brave adventure in admitting the human and transcendent contributions to the people of the earth as a whole though perhaps more at not allowing the latter to continue as though the former. This is, practically speaking, also tremendously risky in that there is also the admission of transcendent persons, realities and their respective representatives.

6 This is not to say that the 'real presence of God' is not in the Eucharist or Message or even to say that it is, but instead to highlight the different world(view)s in appreciating the presence or absence of such.

Yet we do not necessarily know how to distinguish fact from fiction or data from speculation when speaking of the transcendent.

Kuhn (1970: 205) views practitioners of science, herewith natural and social sciences, as ‘puzzle-solvers who must develop the ability to set up and solve problems (rather than relying on model questions supplied to the learners with approved answers curated within their world(view)’. Yet Kuhn goes on to note that such puzzle presentation and solving may be highly valued in the fields of the natural sciences but is appreciated perhaps less and variously in other fields (Kuhn 1970:209). And this is certainly the case not only between science and religion but also between philosophy and theology. The result is that where such puzzle presenting and solving proves particularly difficult in the academic community in relation to ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’. This research proceeds as though identifying and provisionally sorting a puzzle related to God’s absence and presence.

2.2.3 SCIENCE AND HERMENEUTICS

The modern problem of relying on scientific investigation and data and strongly differentiating such data stemming from the relational context can perhaps be visually represented. This visual representation serves as a point of departure for discussing scientific data and its limits and therewith establish the need for hermeneutic contextuality.

By way of example, the chemistry of depression, love, happiness and anxiety can be expressed as a balance between dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. These can be measured and visually expressed. In the diagrams below⁷ the relationship between neurochemicals are correlated with emotions.

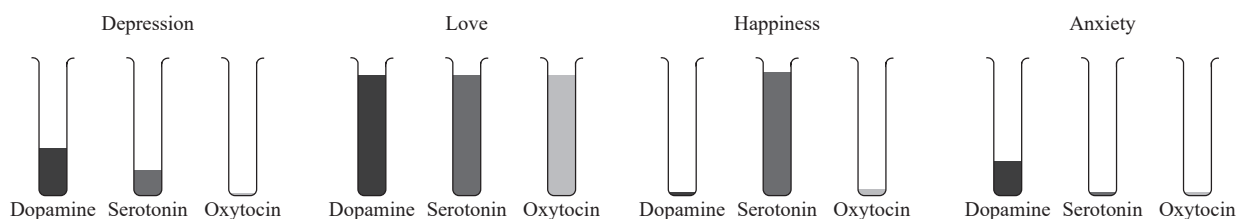


Diagram 2.2.3 The neurochemistry of emotion

The diagram above at once tell us about the relationship between these neurochemicals and correlate them to our emotions. So, we know from the diagram that these chemicals are involved, that they are produced within the brain, that they can be measured, and that the chemical balance between them can be correlated with emotional states. There is no doubt that the diagram above is a scientifically accurate expression of the data. Nevertheless, such recognition tells us nothing about any of these chemicals, their production, measurement, or correlation. The diagram shows what we know about

⁷ This is taken from an animated artwork and cut into the frames here. The original source is online: https://www.reddit.com/r/gifs/comments/arqx9o/love_is_better_than_any_other_drug_its_free_so/

their relationship to each other, their correlation to emotions, while telling us nothing about how we know this or about their relational context.

That we can measure, understand and express the neurochemistry of emotion is both a monumental and recent achievement. And such an achievement is tremendously relevant to everyone whether a medical professional such as a general practitioner or a specialist such as a neurosurgeon. Yet it is a recent achievement, with such data not available to people as recent as two hundred years ago. *The International Society for Neurochemistry* (ISN) was only established in 1965⁸. And though the historical pedigree is as old as religion and philosophy, with various stories about human personality and emotion, this is a 20th century expression of science rooted in the paradigm of objectivity. And as a recent expression of science within Modernity, science has come to be seen as the only valid explanation of anything and everything. The corollary is that what science can't explain is not 'real' and other stories rooted in metaphysics and religion are therefore not true. And here it is that the social sciences struggle to establish themselves as 'scientific', not because they are not science but because they are not the peculiarity that is laboratory science. Yet this struggle is entirely related to a specific kind of 'laboratory science' wherein specific kinds of tests, procedures, approaches, etc. are taken as valid and authoritative. By implication, what cannot be explored in and through test tubes is not, and if it can then it can't really be religion.

Of course, we are not here speaking about the academic fields themselves as formally constituted in relation to each other. Instead we are speaking about 'science' and 'truth' out in the wilds of daily life. An exploration of "spirituality", "religion" and "science" plays between these two worlds, one strict and academic and the other not. We must then converse with both parties.

However, as accurate and neat as those diagrams are, and however much we can explore in tremendous detail these specific neurochemicals and their correlation to emotion, they tell us nothing about anything else. Here there is an ascertained correlation between the neurochemicals and emotions, but correlation does not imply causation and to assume this a logical fallacy. And there with such correlation tells us nothing about why such chemicals are produced or what is causing them. Are these neurochemicals produced in response to genuine relational connection between persons? Or is it the presence of these chemicals that determines the emotional state of the person? Is the chemical state the result of relational connections present, or perhaps as related to memories being recalled, or perhaps in response to fictions as in works of art like books, plays, series or movies? And one step further, are these neurochemicals and emotional states in relation to persons, such as 'you' or 'I', or the transcendent as impersonal or personal? And is the neurochemical-emotional correlation to the transcendent, whether impersonal or personal, produced in response to a relational connection present, being recalled or imagined? This visual report of neurochemicals and their correlation to emotions tells us a tremendous amount, and is a monumental modern achievement, while telling us nothing about their causation. It becomes then not that we cannot explore the 'more' or 'beyond'

8 <https://www.neurochemistry.org/isn-about/>

what science can say but rather that we cannot speak scientifically about that which we cannot speak scientifically about.

And one sees a parallel here between what we know and can verify and what we do not yet know and cannot yet verify. Cupitt (2008: loc.648/2437) notes that there is a classical distinction between empirical fact or sensory stimuli which has become the province of science and eternal and revealed truth that have been the long-standing concern of philosophy and theology.

Yet it matters tremendously that we are loved, by whom we are loved, and who we love in turn. And though we can easily love a “non-real” God, the ‘God after God’ conversations are for some about loving the fiction or idea of God, for others letting go of God-concepts, and for yet others a coming to know and love God as a Person through entering relationally as giving and receiving love. This is not to say that philosophy and theology are not scientific or that science is not theological or philosophical. They are. Instead it’s the recognition of perspective and focus. We can look closely and with a tremendous amount of detail at something or take a step back to see less detail but more of what is going on. And here we have the difference between a specific kind of laboratory science and that of hermeneutic contextuality when asking questions and seeking particular answers.

It is also to recognise that however advanced our technology is that it is still developing. For though we can measure the chemicals in the brain and observe and model the brain in real time, we cannot tell from the data alone whether the emotions are evoked imaginatively, induced chemically, produced concerningly due to some biological problem, or relationally responsive. And the degree to which we need to normalize or disturb the neurochemistry or whether people need to attend to their relationships takes us to a wider perspective than the narrow science that is laboratory science. We can, for example, create tools to measure brain activity but are a long way of understanding the biological and relational foundations. And we can, by way of another example, encourage behavioural and social activities as tools which in turn affect the neurochemicals produced.

Our scientific observations of neurochemicals and their correlation involves scientific and non-scientific observations as enabled by a field of research. As Cupitt (2008: 597/2437) states:

“The question is particularly awkward, because we humans never actually see space or time or the most general principles of natural philosophy directly. All we actually have to go on is the mass of data that is coming in all the time through our sense organs. Spits and spots of sensation: how does it all get built into the coherent and objective world we actually have around us?”

Science is clear that when we speak about anxiety or love that we can drill down to an examinable organ or process or phenomenon. And that though we can explore a specific something, such as brain chemicals, in tremendous detail that the relational context is not as easy. For when speaking about

‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’ we are dealing with a uncontrolled situations and though we can speak scientifically as in a very narrow kind of science about love or anxiety it does not mean that we are not speaking accurately or meaningfully about the relationships or hermeneutic context when doing so. In our colloquial or day-to-day language, we speak clearly and often about these emotions and God. The specificity of a strict scientific language and its checks and balances has a time and place but is not the sole purveyor of truth. Instead, to label something ‘unscientific’ or as ‘having no scientific foundation or basis’ is to exclude a valid conversation on faith assumptions.

So, when speaking about love or anxiety we don’t actually ‘see’ the chemicals and to ‘see’ them is contingent on a host of processes collated into a narrow and specific field. Laboratory science is, simply put, not social science or contextual hermeneutics but can be edited in support of ‘I believe this’ or ‘I believe that’. As noted by Cupitt (2008: 648/2437):

“... there was a sharp distinction between the sensuous world below and the eternal, purely intelligible world above, it was usually thought that whereas science is concerned with the lower world of the senses and empirical fact, philosophy is concerned with the higher world of a priori, eternal truth.”

The work of neurochemistry as illustrated in the diagrams above relies on the arrival at an ‘if’ in relation to the neurochemicals and an ‘if’ in relation to the emotions for the correspondence between them to make sense. Here the question is not about ‘beliefs’ but about the relationship between a specific kind of laboratory science and very general emotions. And here there is a relationship between the rigorousness of scientific data and its establishment coupled with emotions so incredibly diverse in experience and expression. Both are, however, settled as ‘if’s’. And if either end up being questioned, and become an ‘if not’, then either or both as tied to their correspondence become absurd and meaningless. And furthermore, we cannot investigate the emotions of love and anxiety or their relational connections as existing or imagined, and no less real in either case, in the same manner that we investigate their neurochemical foundations in people. And though we can establish that the neurochemical response is dependent on perception rather than relationships existing or imagined, there is an absurdity to arguing from the scientific observations that therefore relationships and associated persons therefore are proven not to exist.

This reference to neurochemistry, emotions, individuals, and existing and imagined relational connections as real, albeit in different ways, plays out similarly in the quest for what mysticism ‘is’. Here we are working with ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’ and do so in keeping with the advances and contributions of the modern era which includes science, philosophy and theology.

2.2.4 HERMENEUTIC CONTEXTUALITY

A new era in philosophy develops from the foundation of the Copernican Revolution. Here the-death-of God plays out in the thinking Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger who offer monumental works of philosophy. Their thinking is further developed by the likes of Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney. Their works collectively contribute toward an understanding of the hermeneutic contextuality of people in different world(view)s whether consecutive, discrete and isolated, or parallel and pluralistic. Our hermeneutics, as science and art of interpretation, enables us to look back to world(view)s that have come before as deconstructive for the purpose of looking forward toward our own world(view) as we reconstruct it updated with all the contributions of the modern era.

The tension between science and religion, following their divorce over the Copernican Revolution, has resulted in each dogmatically unable to hear the other. The goal of postmodern hermeneutics is perhaps not reconciliatory in the sense of trying to bring science and religion together, but instead a child of the divorce seeking to make its own way forward in the world after the divorce. It is here, as noted by Grondin (1995:ix), that hermeneutics seeks ‘not to relativise or trivialize truth but instead to uncover the truth of what is said’. When exploring the quest for what mysticism ‘is’ whether through the work of modern philosophers, Essentialists or Constructivists, or Christians we are catching up to their work within the recent years of the modern era. And when considering hermeneutics, we are considering the spirituality of those postmodern as in their first-person present-continuous engagement with the transcendent as an event that takes place as pursuing the transcendent and as pursuing an understanding of the transcendent. This is a ‘retrieval, repetition and event’ as explicated by Caputo which instead of foreclosing with metaphysics and dogmatics encourages a first-person present-continuous experience of the event of engaging the transcendent.

Hermeneutics is, according to Caputo, an attempt to ‘stick to the original difficulty of life rather than betraying its complexities with metaphysics’ (Caputo 1987:1). It is restoring the original difficulty of Being (Caputo 1987:2) in the sense of “first-person present-continuous” (cf. Waaijman, public presentation, SPIRASA 2018, Johannesburg). It is an attitude that characterizes a postmodern society that is suspicious of those who desire to escape the uncertainty of the present with the certainties of metaphysics and to take away the stress and risk and unknown in the seeking of and after the truth (Caputo 1987:3). Yet this is not a seeking of ‘*a priori*’, meaning guaranteed or metaphysical truth, but instead the truth of Being. Caputo’s “radical hermeneutics” is an “openness to mystery” (Caputo 1987:213) as be-ing, *being*, Be-ing and Be-com-ing/Be(com)ing (Cupitt). Here, clearly, both Cupitt and Caputo follow from Heidegger’s thinking in *Being and time* (1927).

This is then, perhaps, a hermeneutic contextuality enabling us to ask our questions without expecting previous world(view)s to provide already-concluded answers suitable to us. Our hermeneutic is not a return to ‘*a priori*’ or metaphysical truth. Instead it is a turning to our text in context or better

appreciating the context and text as con-text or 'context'. Here both text and context are a form of text as *context*. We lift our eyes from a certain kind of laboratory science not as a leap of faith but a stepping into our own *context* as in our own world and view of the world as world(view). Our choice is not between utter certainty and utter uncertainty as play between absolutes but from certainty as connected to texts and institutions relying on them in their world(view) to the acceptance of provisionally and uncertainty of our lives as our relational *context* which shares much in common with the people who wrote their *texts* from within their *context*. Hermeneutics is the discipline of trying to understand what is said by its motivation and means of expression and not only by its words and its opposite is perhaps an obstreperous misinterpretation by means of valuing our world(view) alone. Contextuality and truth do not entail relativism of truth, but rather the uncovering of truth by shaking off the relativistic difference between our world(view) as modern people and the world(view) of the *text* we are reading. Hermeneutics is thus an exploration of what has been said as synoptic expression of what is *being* said. It takes their world and view of the world seriously too. Hermeneutics is then an active deconstruction of both our and their world(view) in order to here enable an understanding of the 'God after God' conversations as related to God's absence and presence.

Hermeneutics then enables us to engage historical texts from within our world(view) as respecting their world(view) now as *text*. Our hermeneutics must be con-text-ual and as contextual then permitting *texts* to speak what they speak from within their world(view) rather than as though expecting them to speak the sense of ours from within ours. We can only agree on the absurdity of such an expectation. The most important reason to do so is that it admits them to the conversation as though offering us data to work with, however ir-/relevant and ir-/reverrant we may consider it to be. Failing to do so we can easily associate the absurdity of our expectation with the *texts* themselves as being absurd. If we fail to adopt and adapt our hermeneutic tools, we readily make our wrestling with the text primary and therewith the absurdity with which we engage into the absurdity of the text. And then we cannot move from text to *text* or from our context alone between their and our own contexts.

Hermeneutics is not a leap from our modern science back to a dogmatic premodern faith of Christianity as shaped in line with the thinking of Aristotle and Plato. Instead it is a corrective to our world(view) as a *context* that has been long shaped by the divorce between science and religion in the Copernican Revolution. Hermeneutics frees us to the degree to which we are no longer forced to choose sides between the inaccurate science of premodern religion and the reasonable accuracy of modern science. Their failure to communicate affects us and has certainly shaped the world(view) into which we have been born. Yet we do not have to remain locked within their divorce. We can instead negotiate a new and better world(view) respecting both our premodern and modern world(view)s.

For as we speak about our relationships with persons and the transcendent, we are at once speaking about things such as neurochemicals and their correlation to emotions such as love. But our focus is not on those neurochemicals or their correlation, but instead on the 'real' relationship between persons

and the transcendent. This is the language game as further developed from Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Caputo (1997: xxi) reflects that:

“Deconstruction regularly, rhythmically repeats the religiousness, sans the concrete, historical religions; it repeats nondogmatically the religious structure of experience, the category of the religious. It repeats the passion for the messianic promise and messianic expectation, sans the concrete messianism of the positive religions that wage endless war and spill the blood of the other, and that, anointing themselves God’s chosen people, are consummately dangerous to everyone else who is not so chosen; it ceaselessly repeats the viens, the apocalyptic call for the impossible, but without calling for the apocalypse that would consume as the cut that opens the same to the other sans sectarian closure; it repeats Abraham’s trek up to Moriah and makes a gift without return to Isaac, sans the economy of blood sacrifice, repeating the madness of giving without return; it repeats the movement of faith, of expecting what we cannot know but only believe ... of the blindness of faith ... in the impossible, but without the dogmas of positive religious faiths.”

In hermeneutics we recognise the need to work in translation at many levels, including what ‘is’ and what ‘is not’ relevant. So, for example, we recognise that it is not just what is said but also where and how what is said that matters. When dealing with *texts*, and *contexts*, we recognise that some things standing as phenomenally profound in one world(view) can fail the process of being carried across translation. When dealing with historical texts, we are challenged in interpretation and translation. Cupitt (1984: loc.214/5689) encourages us to get “inside the language and culture that shapes our view of the world” and therewith also to distinguish the physical and translated text from the ‘inner *text*’. The goal in, for example psychoanalysis and counselling, is to understand someone else’s experience on its own terms rather than one’s own as helper. The process is also complicated by the psychoanalyst or counsellor having to, through reflective listening and challenging, help those counselled understand and voice their own experience. The work of hermeneutics is to enable precisely such expression and translation. Hermeneutics is thus tremendously important when working with texts from the context or world(view) of Christendom and texts from the context or world(view) of the modern era. Here it is not just the text that matters but also the *context* in which Christendom played out and the context in which the modern era plays out as following the Copernican Revolution wherein both religion and science fail to hear one another because they speak at each other liked those divorced from the divide between their respective world(view)s.

In many ways our religions are products of consecutive world(view)s now out of sync with the modern world(view) as they endure as institutions after the end of their respective world(view)s. We may therefore recognise our common orientation toward an ‘ultimate horizon’ beyond our

world(view)s as a common concern in ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’ while respecting that our historical forebears have long shared diverging conversations encapsulated in their religions offering us diverging mystical experiences and possibilities. And though our religions perhaps share a “tendency to foreclose questions” (Krüger 2018: loc.989/13538) the returning question of God in relation to the ‘God after God’ conversations can only be authentically expressed and pursued by holding ourselves open to the possibility of God. Yet it is not only our religions that would seek to ‘foreclose’, but the modern and secular era of thinking itself forecloses the possibility of God.

The most significant hermeneutics is then the hermeneutics of Be-ing and be(com)ing as shared by Cupitt and Caputo following Heidegger. Deconstruction arises, according to Caputo (1997: xxi) from “a certain experience of the promise sans the dogmatics of any particular faith”. This is not as the ‘given’ in Husserlian terms, or in dogmatic modern Christian sense, but as expectation of something ‘unpresentable, running up against the unforeseeable, a certain absolute experience’. Deconstruction and hermeneutics are then a precursor to the returning question of God after the death-of-God that is itself a continuation of deconstruction as religion (first-person present-continuous) ‘sans’ or without religion (dogmatic theology and belief foreclosing the question to provide certainty). It is an openness, an invitation and exploration open to the transcendent as impersonal and personal, perhaps as *Śūnyatā* rediscovered anew “after” Buddhism and as *Śekîṇā* rediscovered “after” Christianity not at odds with each other though perhaps not yet reconciled either.

This deconstruction is an ongoing of the Reformation that has peaked within the modern era as Catholicism and Protestantism only to collapse as religious world(view)s hosted within the secular world(view) and tensioned in relation to each other. And though this results for Caputo as a hermeneutics of the kingdom of God, meaning an interpretive style in keeping with the prophetic spirit of Jesus (Caputo 2007:26) this is not yet a kingdom theology as the mysticism of God as the transcendent breaking into our world(view) and meeting with us immediately and in Person (*Śekîṇā*). For mysticism in the Christian sense is tied to the expectation that the kingdom arrives in the Person of Jesus and therefore that Jesus arrives in Person to speak and act. As noted by Caputo (2007:32):

“The church tends by the inner momentum of its institutional structure to assert its own authority, to authorize itself ... The church authorizes or founds itself by invoking the authority of the Founder who did not intend to found anything but to announce the good news that the kingdom of God was at hand and the end time was in sight.”

The hermeneutics and deconstruction of Cupitt and Caputo finds like expression in the *anatheism* of Kearney, an invitation that doesn’t foreclose the event of God’s uncertain *Being* with the certainty of metaphysics. The hermeneutic contextuality of the emerging world(view) is the one where the question of God is allowed and even enabled to return anew and afresh on its own terms. And here the returning

question of God can rely on the ‘if’s’ of ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’, and ‘mysticism’. These remain an ‘if not’. Here we make an attempt at moving from ‘if not’ to an ‘if’ by modelling a resolution between Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*) and Presence (*Śekīnā*) in the hermeneutic contextuality of consecutive world(view)s.

2.3 PROBLEM SELECTION

My primary concern relates to people wanting to be religious without religion, to searching for the ‘more’ to living and loving in relation to the transcendent as *Śūnyatā* and *Śekīnā*. Yet in order to get there we must join the conversation taking place since the modern era started. Here there are several ‘God after God’ conversations that follow the transition from a Christian world(view) to a modern and secular world(view). Yet it is also a conversation that must take place with people living as mystic want-to-be’s in our present day. So, the conversation includes both the absence of God and the presence of God within Christianity as a world(view).

There is an irreducible complexity to each discussion that cannot be fully explored within the constraints of this dissertation. The goal is to discover what needs to be explored further. This dissertation then stands as a work-in-progress that cannot be completed within its constraints. This is, however, not a failure as the goal is to understand what must still be explored. It is, here, a recognition of the complexity without betraying it with the certainty of metaphysics (Caputo 1987:1) and embracing the-death-of God whose relevance is still being worked out. Biernot and Lombaard (2018:10) note that:

“...the relevance of the death-of-God theology, not as the last gasp of liberal Protestant theology, but as something still worthy of attention, especially with the framework of Cupitt’s argumentation drawing on the best traditions of criticism of religion of the past two centuries. The idea of objective theism may not be as firmly re-established after its quavering in the wake of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment criticism, as some may still be swayed to believe today. However, we should not wave away that segment of spiritually oriented people for whom God is conceivable only as an ‘impossible love’ similar to their deceased parents or a meaning-giving ‘leading idea’ in their lives. If mainstream Protestantism is withering away, is conservative evangelical Christianity the one we wish to see succeeding it, with its promotion of the image of God as a highly anthropomorphised and sentimentalised figure healing our uncertainties in this life and offering an eternal abode in the future one?”

Krüger (2018: loc.669/13538) notes the possibility of developing “a synoptic perspective within one existing tradition, assimilating the other traditions into that one as it is” and notes Nicholas of Cusa

(Cusanus) (1401-1464) as having done so. But we wish to avoid this. This is perhaps what Masao Abe has done in conversation with various people, such as in Cobb and Ive's *The emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian conversation* (1991) or Keenan's *The meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology* which offers a Mahāyāna Buddhist reinterpretation of Christ (1993). Abe collapses the meaning of Christ through *kenosis*, the self-emptying of God in Christ, into the *Śūnyatā* of Buddhism while Keenan offers a Mahāyāna reinterpretation or articulation of the meaning of Christ though perhaps without maintaining the integrity of *Śekîṇâ*.

I do not wish to make the Christianity of Christendom or the Christianity of Catholicism or Protestantism central. Instead I wish to move forward as a post-Christian 'after' Christianity. To do this is to touch on what Krüger (2018: loc.743/13538) calls the "avoided (and evasive) transcendent" within Christianity itself. The work here is synoptic in discerning the relational presence of God across consecutive Christian world(view)s and requires getting less inside of the text of historical Christianity than the *Being* of God today. The returning question of God is then set within the 'God after God' conversations as related to God's absence and presence within 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'mysticism'. Krüger (2018: loc.743/13538) notes that:

"Simplistic repetition today of any of the forms taken by any of the old traditions in a bygone epoch would amount to ahistorical or anachronistic fundamentalism or romanticism. The alternative would be to engage in a process of responsible, reflective mediation and articulation of the many pasts that we are heirs of today, in the context of a larger intercultural multilogue."

This is then not a choice for what Biernot and Lombaard (2018:10) call "conservative evangelical Christianity" but for what can come after it or Kearney (2010: loc.3/248) "dogmatic theism". The problem is akin to a series of problems interrelated and intertwined with one another. Our goal is to gain clarity on what must be explored and to articulate clearly and simply the contributions of modern philosophy, mysticism and Christianity toward the returning question of God after the-death-of God.

2.3.1 INTERRELATED PROBLEMS

The 'God after God' conversations take place in relation to the changeover from a sacred to a secular world(view). It incorporates the continued work of philosophers, the quest for what mysticism 'is' and Christianity as set within a secular, modern and scientific world(view). Yet as taking place after the transition from the sacral world(view) of Christendom they are the 'God after God' conversations as taking place "after" the world(view) is no longer defined by or in relation to God. It is a complex and

intertwined problem where different world(view)s compete with and both support and contradict one another. We live in a world(view) that is at once secular yet brings together religious world(view)s more numerous in expression and number than previously available to any people group. This at once makes no sense while making complete sense and we are challenged to understand this.

The interrelated problems include, and are by no means limited to: (1) the changeover of the secular world(view) and the divorce between science and religion; (2) the-death-of God and the recognition of the conditionalism of our world(view)s; (3) the quest for what mysticism 'is' as offered by early essentialists following the change of world(view) and the-death-of God in a world(view) that brings together the whole world's people and their religious heritage; (4) the translation of Christianity from the world(view) of Christendom into the world(view) of the secular age and therewith Christianity as now Catholicism and Protestantism following the Reformation that took place alongside the Copernican Revolution; (5) the absence and presence of God; and (6) the returning question of God after the secular age as afresh and new without having to choose either the religions preceding the secular age or their expressions within.

2.3.2 'IF' AND 'THEN'

Our entire world(view) rests on an 'if' and 'then'. In a specific kind of laboratory science, we build on various contributions to arrive at that 'if'. And having arrived at an 'if' we can proceed to the 'then'. It makes sense then that the problem with 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'mysticism' depends on our arriving at 'if's' in order to proceed to 'then's'. But what are the 'if's' relevant to the 'God after God' conversations?

We shall then aim to arrive at an 'if' for 'religion' by way of modern philosophy in relation to the-death-of God and conditionalism, recognising a convergence between Eastern and Western philosophy on no-thing-ness by way of *Śūnyatā* and the legacy of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Wittgenstein; for 'spirituality' in relation to modern Essentialism; and for 'religion' as modern Christianity in relation to the institutional church and the practical outworking of the doctrine of revelation. And this small collection of 'if's' will enable a hermeneutic exploration of Christian mysticism toward a Christianity 'after' Christianity.

2.3.3 THE ABSENCE OF GOD AND GOD-ABSENCE

The 'God after God' conversations take place in relation to the absence of God and the felt God-absence within those to whom the question of God returns. Here there is the recognition that the secular age challenges the earlier sacred world(view)s. And though we explore it mostly in relation

to God-absence as a common denominator among all religious world(view)s in the secular age. We are challenged to differentiate between the absence of God and God-absence.

The problem is also complicated by the relative lack of God-experience, however ‘God’ is conceived. We recognise that many Hindu faithful attend their traditional or modern services within a modern secular world(view) without themselves experiencing *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*) and that few are considered to historically have done so; that the Buddhist attends their services without attaining *Enlightenment* (*bodhi*); and that the Christian attends their services without experiencing relational the immediate *relational presence of God* (*Šeḱînâ*). Yet in their previous sacral world(view)s people believed in Self-realization, Enlightenment and God without themselves experiencing such either. The changeover of world(view) from sacred to secular presents unique challenges with regards to our understanding of pluralism and mysticism if mysticism is understood to relate to the transcendent rather than the spirituality or religion as expressed within a sacral or secular world(view). Each religious world(view) experiences their own equivalent of the Copernican Revolution in transitioning from their sacral age to the secular age and perhaps their own equivalents of the Reformation in redefining themselves for the secular age. We, however, focus here on the Christian world(view) and the reality and meaning of the absence of God and God-absence within Christianity as world(view) and practiced and institutional religion.

This also, to some extent, encourages us to keep the 'God after God' conversations as pluralistic as it is focused on Christianity and the absence of God and God-absence within Christianity as ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’.

2.3.4 EMPTINESS AND ABSENCE AS DIVIDE OR MULTIPLY BY ZERO

The philosophical usage of the absence of God and the-death-of God within Western philosophy somewhat approximates the usage of *Enlightenment* (*bodhi*) in Buddhist philosophy as the deeper ontological truth of *Emptiness* or *No-thing-ness* (*Śūnyatā*) in relation to the cosmos, society and religion (*anatta*⁹) and the self (*suññata*¹⁰). Yet there is a parallel between the *Emptiness* of Buddhism and the absence of God and the-death-of God in secular world(view). And in the same way that *Emptiness* is used in relation to Hinduism in Buddhism to argue for the acceptance of *Emptiness* over the belief in God without corresponding experience of God, so too does it apply to Christian theism in the world(view)s of Christendom and the secular age.

This absence is often employed as a divide or multiply by zero in the sense that whatever you believe about the reality of God can be discounted on the basis of God’s absence. And so too can the felt experience of God-absence be discounted on the basis of the absence of God. Yet adding the zero

9 The word “*anatta*” is used here in the sense that God is not in our world or world(view)s and religions as ‘no God or Self present’ and as not being an independent something like a rock or tree or person.

10 The word “*suññata*” is used here in the sense that there is no ontological reality to the self but instead that the physical and social self is impermanent and is born and passes away.

to the belief in God also means adding the absence of God to the belief in God. Here one effectively changes nothing about the reality of God. We are challenged to go beyond this divide/multiply or add/subtract zero as *Emptiness* and the absence of God. Here we must also consider the reality of the relational presence of God, of *Šekînâ*, of God drawing near in Person to speak and act.

2.4 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY AS REFLECTION

The dissertation is primarily a conversation and reflection, a wrestling with what Christianity 'is' in relation to God's absence and presence as 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'mysticism'. As such it stands here in isolation with the intentionality of orienting the author toward further studies related to Christianity in the post-secular age as Christianity after Christianity. Such studies may, in the future, include contemporary Christian mysticism, *originating theistic experience*, and the theological and practical nurturing and cultivation of Christocentric mystics and Christocentric mystical communities of faith.

The key to reconciling their contributions lies in defining mysticism and developing a model of experience enabling the explorer, seeker, representative, Source(s) and academic of religion and spirituality to participate in the conversation. We must account for not only the variety of but also the variety within each religion. And we must incorporate the 'God after God' conversations and allow the question of God to return after the ways it has been formulated and anew or afresh in comparison to the options that we have been working with.

2.5 ACCESS TO RELEVANT RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research context is academic and ecumenical, taking place in relation to a lived and practiced faith of Christianity as a faith in crisis in the secular age largely arising from the absence of God and God-absence. Published and respected texts are engaged in order to understand what the problem between Christianity as faith and Christianity as 'expérience' is defined respectively in relation to the institutional church and the practice of the relational presence of God. And these both feed into, and receives feedback from, a dynamic and relational working environment that is both post-modern and post-religious where the question of God returns God after the-death-of God and after the Christianity of the modern and secular age.

2.6 TERMS AND TERMINOLOGY

The struggle to express the meaning of “God” in language is well noted by Frankenberry (1987:24-25) who says that:

“From Plato to the present, human reason has struggled to give conceptual expression to what is meant by “God”. Competing rational systems of thought have been constructed, skilful theistic arguments have been advanced, and bold speculative syntheses have been proposed.

In recent years, as the problem of God as shifted from the onotological to the linguistic level, questions have been raised as to the meaningfulness of all conceptions of God and the cognitivity of any assertive claims concerning God’s existence, nature, attributes, and relations to the world.”

There are a number of concepts that recur throughout the dissertation, and though explained at some point, perhaps the explanation occurs later than the introduction of the concept or word. Therefore it is best to refer to the glossary provided earlier to familiarise the reader ahead with these concepts as contextualised within this dissertation.

2.7 AUDIENCE

This researcher is situated within an era of decolonization wherein Christianity varies considerably within a context and across contexts. Thus there is a tremendous difference between highly traditional and modern churches, between Orthodox and independent, denominations and movements, Catholic and Protestant, as well as between Catholic and Catholic, Protestant and Protestant, etc. Yet the 'God after God' conversations are relevant to people throughout the western world. When we speak about Christianity we speak about it is a whole and generally with the awareness a broad understanding is not achieved at the exclusion of the complexity and diversity. The 'God after God' conversations this researcher engages in includes people in the far north such as United Kingdom and European Union, the far west within North America and Canada, and the far south within Australia from the perspective of a South African. The goal is to enable the furthering of the 'God after God' conversation not for Christianity but with those postmodernists engaging the world's religions, including Christianity, not to return to them but to answer the questions as people who are post-Christian and post-religious. This is not, then, a dissertation grappling with Christianity as it finds its way in the modern world but for those grappling with finding their way out of Christianity and religion in a post-modernising world.

2.8 CONCLUSION

I began by acknowledging that at the heart of this dissertation lies an elusive problem perhaps enhanced rather than resolved here. In its simplest form this dissertation is a conversation about God with others conversing about God as 'God after God' conversations. This is not a work that can claim to speak for or on behalf of Christianity while focusing on and being concerned with Christianity.

Here the exploration is of worldviews and Christianity leading into the present, but its not a work for Christians in the present. Instead, it is work done in order to gain an understanding of Christianity as it has preceded into the present world wherein the returning question of God is also the question that returns after the Christianity of the modern and secular age.

Modern philosophy

The secular age of religious pluralism we live in differs remarkably from the earlier world(view) of Christendom. Modern philosophy grapples with the significance of the Copernican Revolution and the death-of God and metaphysics. In this chapter we explore the notion of a world(view), their change, and the diversification of religion in relation to the secular world(view). We also consider that multiple religious world(view)s coexist today by finding space and expression within the broader secular age as a place-holder and banner world(view). modern philosophy wrestles with the transition of world(view)s and is a significant “God after God” conversation related to the absence of God and God-absence.

3.1 THE MODERN ERA

We recognise that there is a correspondence between the world we live in, those we live within in relation to the world, and the way we see, interpret and understand the world. As such, we share paradigms with our society and community. And as the world changes, so too does our view of the world. Our world(view) changes because the world changes and as our world changes so too does our view of thereof. We then speak of a world(view) bringing both the world and our viewpoint together. As one’s world(view) is shared, communal, participatory, and constellational ‘paradigm’.

List 3.1.1 World(view)s as constellational paradigms

- 3.1.1.1 ‘Paradigm’ may stand for the entire *constellation* of beliefs, values, techniques, contributions, etc. shared by members of a given community (Kuhn 1970:175) as well as what that community excludes. We use the concept in this sense as world(view) as recognised academic fields whether in the natural sciences or humanities as well as of boundaried social groups and sub-groups. We also make use of ‘paradigm’ in this sense when speaking of the pre-Modern western world(view) as the Christian-Aristotelian world(view), Modernity as its consecutive successor, and of the modern Christian world(view) as developed post-Christendom in relation to and within the world(view) of Modernity.
- 3.1.1.2 ‘Paradigm’ may denote one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete *puzzle-solutions* which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles (Kuhn 1970:175). We note this earlier and will later reflect on Christianity as a faith paradigm or world(view) wherein the

church is paradigmatically and constellational central to Christians and Christianity. Christianity itself continuous as various constellational paradigms or world(view)s within the banner world(view) of the secular age.

As constellations of paradigms, world(view)s are highly functional and boundary the world that people inhabit and interpret their world for them.

List 3.1.2 The basic functions of a world(view).

- 3.1.2.1 **World(view)s provide explanations.** We do not figure out everything for ourselves without the input of people who have come before. Every world(view) provides explanations of the world, society and ourselves. These explanations are the stories that structure and enable our relationship with our environment and other people. As such, our world(view) is not just of the world we live in but also the filter through which we appreciate and boundary our world. Different world(view)s tell different stories about the world and people live in relation to their world as guided by those stories.
- 3.1.2.2 **General assumptions and core paradigms.** Our world(view) is the basis for evaluating, judging and validating our experience while itself creating the boundaries of what the world is and teaching us how to live in relation to it. Events and circumstances are approached from the point of view or reference of our world(view). As such, our world(view) consists of general assumptions and core paradigms we are socialised into and contribute toward maintaining.
- 3.1.2.3 **Psycho-social reinforcement.** As we share a world(view) in common with others, we all contribute toward reinforcing the set of general and shared assumptions, core paradigms, and assumed explanations. This enables social cohesiveness within our world(view) wherein the patterning of our family, occupation, and faith takes place. Our world(view) is then co-created and translates the world abstracted from stimuli and our social world. There is a powerful psychological and social, or psycho-social, dovetailing between our world(view) as interpreter and interface strengthening the individual in relation to the world(view) and the world(view) in relation to its people.
- 3.1.2.4 **Integrate new information.** Our values, philosophies, experiences and understanding of the world is inherited and then need not be personally confirmed or defined anew, with anything new first processed against ready-made templates as model questions and established answers. As such, our world(view) consists of general assumptions with most new experiences, insights and theories integrated positively within the collective world(view). World(view)s then, and in general, develop incrementally through innovation. And what lies too far outside our world(view) may be explained away or rejected and in so doing our world(view) remains stable.

We first begin with a model of a world(view) and then explore what sets the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) so far apart from the modern world(view) to show that the Christian world(view) has more in common with the modern world(view) than the Christendom it succeeds.

3.1.1 MODEL OF A WORLD(VIEW)

A world(view) is then a meta-concept/perspective/lens comprised of the world we live in, our understanding and explanations thereof, and the society we live within. We are born into a world(view) and contribute toward it. Our world(view) is a conditional psycho-social co-construction between the individual, their environment and their broader community. A world(view) is then both the environment we live in as the world and the lens through which we interpret that environment. It is our view of the world, the world we live in, and those we live in relation to.

A world(view) is thus a meta-translator between people and their world as well as people sharing their world(view) before them and after them. It is anchored historically in the past, geographically in the present, and evolutionally or eschatologically in the future. A world(view) looks to the horizons of time and geography as well as the depths and height of their accomplishments and contributions while being shared across generations in the past and future. A world(view) thus defines the world even as it is reciprocally defined by it.

And as a conditional, temporal, and social construction we can model a world(view) as follows in *Diagram 3.1.1.1 Anatomy of a world(view)* below.¹¹

List 3.1.1.1 Anatomy of a world(view) above:

- 3.1.1.1.1 **Beginning.** Every era and world(view) has a “beginning” associated with the history of particular people with an era easier to date than their world(view). The “beginning” of an era may be dated to events and individuals, though debated as dynamic process of originating.
- 3.1.1.1.2 **End.** Every era and world(view) also has an “end” associated with the history of a particular people with said “end” easier to date as era than world(view). Even as the “beginning” is a dynamic process so too is the “end” a dynamic process often dated to events and individuals.
- 3.1.1.1.3 **World(view).** Every world(view) is a meta-, unifying- and orienting-perspective and story that can be identified with a particular people within specific geographies and dates. Here we find the core operating paradigm or assumptions shared across a world(view). With regard to God, in a secular world(view) the paradigmatic script is “that God is not” and within a religious world(view) “that God is”.

¹¹ JS Krüger offers this model in *Signposts to spirituality*, allowing us to here explore some of the implications in relation to the recognised convergence of *world(view)s* and emergence of a postmodern *world(view)*.

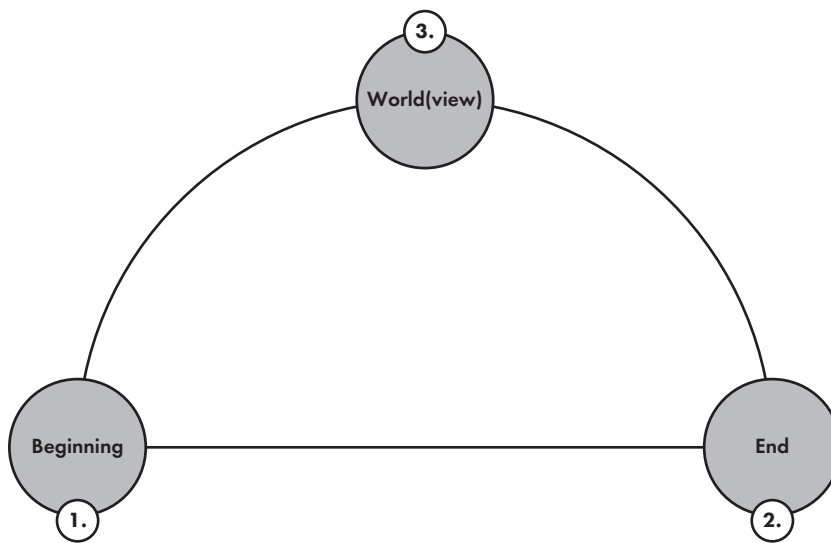


Diagram 3.1.1.1 Anatomy of a world(view)

When considering the life-cycle of a worldview we may model as per *Diagram 3.1.1.2 Life cycle of a world(view)* above, resulting in a paradigm shift with regard to religious belief in God. Expanding on the diagram above we retain “beginning”, “end” and “world(view)” but recognise that both era and world(view) develop from “beginning” to “end” whilst maintaining their “story” or “world(view)”.

List 3.1.1.2 Life cycle of a world(view)

- 3.1.1.2.4 **Expansion.** Every era, and related world(view), develops over time and expands in scope toward a peak of civilization and story from their “beginning”. We may think of this as expansion in the form of developing, exploring and growing.
- 3.1.1.2.5 **Recession.** Every era, and related world(view), recedes over time and declines in scope from the peak of their civilization toward their “end”. We may think of the recession in the form of a contraction, stabilization and regression.
- 3.1.1.2.6 **Retrospective.** Every world(view), related to an or consecutive eras, tells a story that is cohesive and based on their heights. While expanding, every world(view) tells a story in light of its projected heights rather than in keeping with its state of being or level of self-evaluated progress.
- 3.1.1.2.7 **Origin.** Every world(view) tells a story going beyond the beginning of the era it speaks for, though the origin is only accessible through storytelling.
- 3.1.1.2.8 **Decline.** Every world(view) , related to consecutive eras, tells a story that is equally cohesive during its recession. While declining, every world(view) tells a story in light of its projected heights rather than in keeping with its progress. Where religious world(view)s tell creation stories, such as Christianity telling the story of God creating

everything from nothing, we find our secular modern world(view) telling a similar story of the Big Bang. Both are available in texts and held to, albeit divisively, by representatives and adherents of their respective world(view)s.

- 3.1.1.2.9 **Destiny.** Every world(view) tells a story going beyond the end of the era it speaks for, though the destiny is only accessible through storytelling. Where religious world(view)s tell eschatological stories related to how God is going to close history our secular modern world(view) tells a similar story of the Big Crunch. Both stories are available in texts and held to, albeit divisively, by representatives and adherents of their respective world(view)s.
- 3.1.1.2.10 **Secular world(view).** Every secular world(view), often as successor to sacral world(view), transitions to the default faith position of secularism that ‘God is not’. The secular age challenges every sacral world(view) most especially with regards to their politics, science and religion. Here whether exploring the world(view)s of Christians, Buddhists or Hindus (by way of example rather than as exhaustive) each transitions from a sacral world(view) where their respective faiths played a central role in society to a secular world(view) where they continue as anachronistic and peripheral.
- 3.1.1.2.11 **Religious world(view).** Every sacral world(view), as now rooted in their modern secular world(view), seeks to retain their earlier faith position that their ‘God-concept is’, though what God ‘is’ as ‘concept’ differs significantly between and among Christians, Buddhists and Hindus. Here there is a preservation of sacral world(view) as continuing into the culture, faith and values related of the secular age. Here the faith diversifies within the family and within society. We may, for example, find (1) religious fundamentalists rejecting the secular world(view) as easily as find (1) a sacral conservatism adhering to sacral values and faiths interpreted anew in a secular world(view) as readily as (1) liberal expressions redefining the faith entirely through the lens of the secular age.

In light of the above, we need to consider that our secular world(view) is in constant dialogue with our sacral world(view)s and that such dialogue is no longer predominantly a theistic Christian or secular atheistic or humanist concern. And on the foundation of the converging world(view)s within the secular age a new world(view) is emerging that is ‘post-’ not only with regards to the secular

and modern but also the nationalisms and religions that succeed the secular age. And yet, within this world(view) that is “post-” with respect to religion, that the question of God returns afresh and anew.

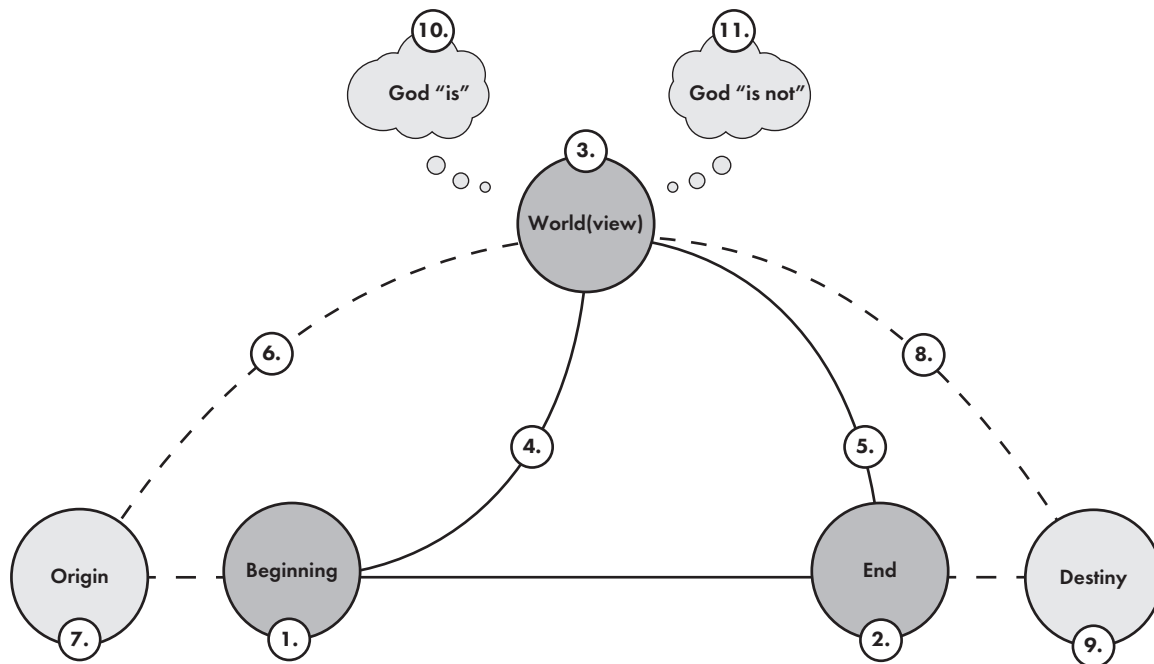


Diagram 3.1.1.2 Life cycle of a world(view)

3.1.2 CONSECUTIVE WESTERN WORLD(VIEW) S

World(view)s develop as successors to one another and over a relatively long history. Our present secular world(view) developed over a long period of time in relation to historical peoples and eras within a narrow northern geographic area variously considered western, European and Christian and as expressed in and through modern colonial and cultural expansionism. And though it is perhaps more conceptually than geographically boundaried today, the historical lineage of Christian people and their faith can be traced through the early modern era to the medieval period to the early Roman Empire. And though it is a complex history, we may summarise it as per *Diagram 3.1.2 Consecutive world(view)s* below:

List 3.1.2.1 Consecutive world(view)s

- 3.1.2.2.1 **Graeco-Roman world(view).** The Graeco-Roman people, era and world(view) pre-date the modern world(view) and yet their world(view) is the foundation of our modern world(view).
- 3.1.2.2.2 **Medieval world(view).** The Medieval people, era and world(view) succeed the Western Graeco-Roman world and internalise the Graeco-Roman world(view). The later Medieval era sees the rise of Christendom as a direct expression of the earlier

world(view), yet the Medieval world(view) remains unique. The Medieval world(view) owes itself to the Graeco-Roman era, people and world(view).

3.1.2.2.3 **Modern world(view).** The modern people(s), era and world(view)s arise from both Graeco-Roman and Medieval world(view)s, yet the modern world(view) is unique. This era differs from its predecessors in that they were successive and competitive, often eliminating each other. Here the modern world(view) owes itself to the Graeco-Roman and Medieval eras, peoples and world(view)s. It differs in that it is an equalizer among the diverse world(view)s of the modern world enabling the convergence of all peoples and bringing the somewhat equal challenge of secularism to all religions.

3.1.2.2.4 **Post-modern world(view).** The Postmodern people(s), era and world(view)s arise from the modern world(view)s, yet is not only unique in its own right. Yet it equally owes its existence to the Graeco-Roman, Medieval and modern peoples, eras and world(view)s. It differs from the earlier world(view)s in being conditionally constructed from all the modern and modernizing world(view)s. Yet it is, potentially, equally post- with regard to all their religions and the anatheistic conversation is likely equally post- with regard to all their secularisms and religions.

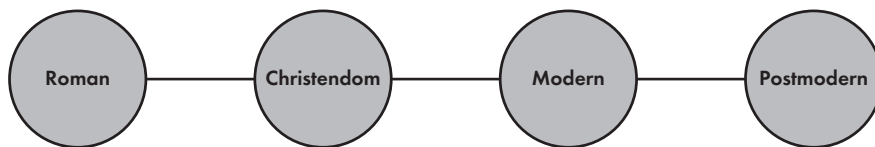


Diagram 3.1.2 Consecutive world(views)

Of course, as summarised above this is highly simplified. We may see these as successive geographic and historical peoples and their respective world(views) enabling a recent global people. As such this world(view) incorporates the contributions of various preceding civilizations as world(view)s as though it is the same world(view) advancing. And though each preceding world(view) was perhaps more bound to peoples and places, the new post-sacral world(view) is globally connected with and enabled by the recently modernised generations of all the world's peoples. As such, the post-sacral world(view) is as equally a post-Western world(view) as it is a post-African or post-Asian world(view) and yet it is conditionally co-constructed from among the various modernised and modernizing peoples in, for example but not limited to, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Looking back, we can easily acknowledge that the post-sacral western people arise in relation to the secular European people, the secular in relation to the sacral people in the same geographic region, and the sacral in that region in relation to the Roman people spanning what is now Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. And though we may debate the dates and events in relation to

each, and even the notion of the West or Europe (as we can for Africa or Asia) such debate is not immediately necessary for the development of a model of successive world(view)s and the 'God after God' conversations explored in relation to the post-sacral age as Christianity *after* modernity.

We may also note that Christianity should perhaps no longer be considered a western phenomenon and faith as the broader Christian lineage extended across North Africa and the Middle East and beyond. Yet as Christianity has classically been centred in Rome in Christian thinking following Rome's adoption of Christianity (380) we can bundle it together with an exploration of consecutive western world(view)s within the same geographic region. Even ahead of the fall of the Western Empire of Rome (around 500) we find Rome and Constantinople serving as the strong poles of the Christian faith that is by then a divided Roman Empire with centres in each. This division was perhaps, in part, cemented for the Christian faith following the Islamic conquests of Alexandria (641), Antioch (613) and Jerusalem (637), leaving Constantinople as its equivalent in the East to Rome in the West till the Great Schism (1054) and reinforced by the thankless sacking of the Constantinople by its Western brethren (1204). It is then fair to discuss the lineage of Christianity as tied to the consecutive western world(view)s, bearing in mind that it is not solely a western phenomenon.

This is in large part due to our focus on 'God after God' conversations that include Catholicism and Protestantism as descendants of an earlier Western Christendom itself rooted as first as the church in the Roman Empire and then as monasticism in the Western Empire preceding Western Catholicism as perhaps even synonymous with Christendom. We do, however, need to be mindful of the complicated connection of the developing Christendom with regard to its patristic foundations and the 'ekklesia' as the people of God rather than Christianity as the institution of the church as sponsored by the Empire as the official religion of the empire or Christendom as a society within the former and broader Roman Empire and the later historical developments earlier in Europe, the Middle East and Africa and more recently as following colonization and post-colonization. This enables us to triangulate the trajectory of the faith as synoptically expressed within the 'ekklesia' as the people of God within a broader society preceding the West as patristic foundations, within the developing West, and succeeding the West in the post-modern world(view)s as related to the church, Christendom and Catholicism and Protestantism as its descendants.

And though *Diagram 3.1.2 Consecutive world(view)s* above is perhaps too simplistic, we should note that there is a complex and dynamic relationship between the Christian faith, the Roman Empire, Christendom and its descendants as Catholicism and Protestantism leading into the early and later modern era.

3.1.3 WHY WORLD(VIEW) S CHANGE

Within the modern era of the history of the west we experienced religion, science and politics branching off into discrete endeavours from a unified Medieval Era as Christendom. Recognised as such, there is a political reformation within politics, a scientific reformation within science, and a religious reformation within religion which all have to do with their respective governance. It is important to note that the present Christian world(view) developed in relation to the faith first being adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire, furthered through remaining independent of that same Empire, later coming to be so closely associated with the Christendom that is the new Holy Roman Empire and Holy Roman Church in the later Medieval Era, which brings us to the modern world(view) wherein the reformations within science, politics and religion provide us with Christianity as the church that is now a highly complicated bundle and collection of Catholicism-s and Protestantism-s. Again, though the dates and details are important, they are not immediately relevant to the development of our model of the Christian worldview.

There is thus an interplay between consecutive world(view)s that build on each other. A world(view) has a lifespan as modelled below in *Diagram 3.1.3.1 Paradigmatic contributions within a world(view)* below. World(view)s change once incremental challenges add up to produce a revolution wherein the world(view) is reconstituted anew.

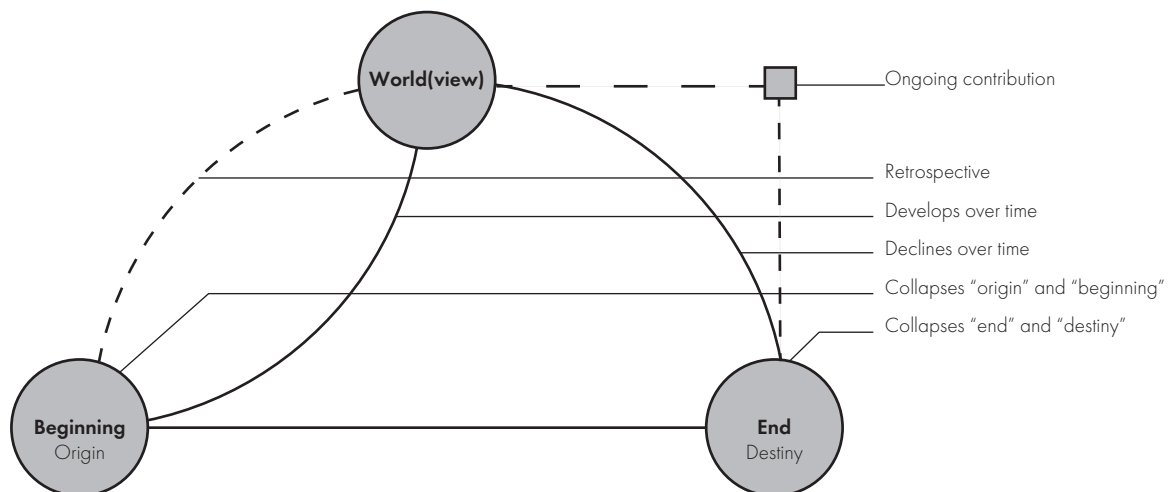


Diagram 3.1.3.1 Paradigmatic contributions within world(view)s

List 3.1.3.1 Paradigmatic contributions within world(view)s

- 3.1.3.1.1 **The straw that breaks the camel's back (the human side).** Advances and contributions as innovations and paradigms are constantly emerging and integrating. Not every advance, contribution or idea will lead to the reconstitution of world(view). However, there are those that serve not only as contributive but redefining. The reconstitution of a world(view) depends on the consensus of many, as evidenced by the Heliocentrism of

Aristarchus of Samos (310-230 BCE) being rejected and that of Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543 CE) accepted with the Copernican Revolution. (One could, and perhaps should, argue that Christ's revolution over temple-based and nation-based religion was overturned with the establishment and development of the church.) Where New Physics opens us to a new scientific paradigm following soon from the Newtonian so too does Pietism and the subsequent Awakenings open Christianity to a new religious paradigm following the Reformation as unfinished.

- 3.1.3.1.2 **The activity of a transcendent Person (the divine side).** A world(view) can also be defined by the intervention and activity of a divine beings. And whether one and the same or simply different transcendent persons making the same claim as competitors is not a question we seek to answer here. Instead we recognise that such a transcendent Person is reported as self-identify as the "I AM" to Moses (c. 13th century BCE); that the historical man Jesus returns as the risen Lord (c. 6/4 BCE to 33/36 CE) appearing (c. 33-36 CE) to Saul of Tarsus (c.5-64/67 CE) and to no small number of others in the millennia since; that such a transcendent Person is reported to send representatives such as with the angel Gabriel appearing to Muhammad (570-632 CE) in a cave (c. 610 CE). And though not world(view) reconstituting as a fact¹² alone, this is the like experience of many even today and not well considered by philosophers. We can add to this the various experiences of primal and shamanistic as well as new age spiritualities and spiritualism involving transcendent persons as ancestors, angels, and gods/goddesses.¹³

Though world(view)s have mostly ended with the death of civilizations they have also developed within as consecutive world(view)s wherein the same world(view) has been reconstituted through world altering events. In short, world(view)s change because they must.

12 Give or take a measure of meaning of "fact" and "myth" as synonymous. There is much needed research into transcendent persons and their interaction with people.

13 Modernity may supply model questions and answers with regards to the activity of transcendent personalities, as we shall explore in the next chapter of this dissertation.

We model this in *Diagram 3.1.3.2 The paradigmatic redefinition of world(view)s* below.

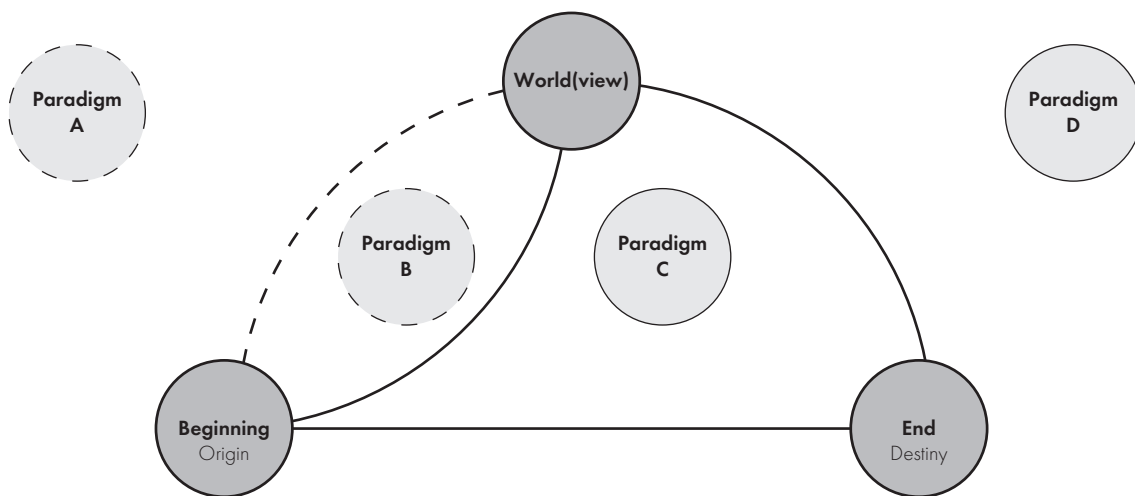


Diagram 3.1.3.2 The paradigmatic redefinition of world(view)s

List 3.1.3.2 The paradigmatic redefinition of a world(view)

- 3.1.3.2.1 **Paradigm A.** An outdated paradigm no longer contributing to the present world(view). Yet it is perhaps one that has perhaps never played a role in the past of this world(view) even though, objectively speaking, such a paradigm exists elsewhere.
- 3.1.3.2.2 **Paradigm B.** A paradigm that played a role in the past of this world(view) but no longer plays a significant role in the current and established world(view). An example is perhaps that of our sacral world(view)s that are outdated but once defined the world(view).
- 3.1.3.2.3 **Paradigm C.** A paradigm that plays a present role in this world(view) and has found a place within the banner world(view). Examples of this include our sacral world(view)s continuing in the present secular world(view).
- 3.1.3.2.4 **Paradigm D.** A paradigm that is significant but not incorporated into the world(view) as a banner world(view) or the continuing sacral world(view) it hosts.

Most events and contributions are integrated by a world(view) into itself, however a world(view) is constituted anew through world-altering contributions. Whenever the world is reshaped so too is a civilisation's view of the world. There is thus an outgoing world(view) that gets de-constructed from within and then re-constituted around a new paradigmatic centre that emerges from within the outgoing world(view) as a new world(view).

Modernization enables the convergence of all people's which changes both world and world(view). Through modernization previously isolated people are now enabled to live together in relation to their world and each other in a new, modern, way. Modernization is, however, not a simple process of expanding a world(view) but rather a reconstitution of a world(view) around a new paradigmatic

centre. It needs to be said that though Christianity has been paradigmatically central within the same geographic region that there is a complex internal relationship between Christianity and Christendom wherein they should not be considered synonymous. We can, however, appreciate that they may be considered synonymous.

The 'God after God' conversations are a tremendously brave adventure in admitting the human and transcendent contributions to the people of the earth as a whole. This is, practically speaking, also tremendously risky in that there is also the admission of transcendent persons, realities and their respective representatives.

3.1.4 THE COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

Within the Western world(view) the Copernican Revolution is a decisive transition between the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) of Christendom as supported by metaphysics in the sacral age and by rationalism in the secular age. The Christian Reformation takes place in the same era resulting in the institutional church as now Catholicism and Protestantism. And therewith we find each respective expression of the institutional church wrestling with each other and Modernity.

We may view the complex and interrelated history of the Western Roman Empire as comprising a period wherein: (1) Christianity was adopted as the official religion; (2) the Western Roman Empire fell to the Visigoths; (3) Christendom emerged to take over governance of the former Western Roman Empire and re-established the monarchy and papacy; (4) these all contributed toward the sacral world(view) of Western secular society.

The most significant transition lies, however, with the remarkable difference in cosmology. In the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) the entire Cosmos revolved around the Earth at its centre. Here the sum total of the universe consisted of 6 planets, 42 fixed constellations set against a crystalline sphere, and the abode of God lying just beyond. Everything within the Cosmos was neatly and hierarchically ordered. Here transcendence was spatially conceived and God viewed as reigning over the cosmos as a geographically-transcendent outsider. In this world(view) one could literally ascend through the heavens to place a flag on the terrain of Heaven lying beyond the Cosmos on the other side of the crystalline sphere. And God reigned hierarchically over the geographic and political terrain of the Earth through the representation of the Emperor and the Pope who live in Rome.

It is in the context of the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) that the Copernican Revolution takes place and religion, philosophy, science and politics are unbundled from each other. It is also here that the most significant tension emerges between science and religion resulting in a divorce that continues till the present. Where the older world(view) united politics, religion, philosophy, science, economics, etc. all under one singular metaphysical umbrella as the given world(view) the secular world(view) distinguishes each from the other. This world(view) also transitions between very

different conceptions of how the world is governed. It transitions from a hierarchical conception with God reigning over the Heavens and on the Earth through the representation of the Emperor and Pope in Rome to humans governing their respective nation-states and ordering their respective institutions. Where we previously had a united metaphysical philosophy drawing every governing institution together, we now have rationalism providing internal coherence to discrete or separated institutions.

Alongside the Copernican Revolution the Reformations of the institutional Church establish Christianity after Christendom as Catholicism and Protestantism in all their diversity. Here the Catholic Church views itself as governed by the Pope on the basis of Tradition or Apostolic Succession while the Protestant Church views itself as governed by the Scriptures on the basis that they are the eternal and living Word of God seen as taking precedence over Tradition.

The Copernican Revolution marks a transition in secular and religious thinking. Here the older metaphysics of the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) is replaced with the Rationalism of Modernity. And within this period, we see the emergence of (1) early essentialism, (2) Constructivism, (3) Essentialism, (4) modern Christian theology, and (5) modern Christian spirituality. And each struggles to understand the religions of the world in light of the transition from the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) to the rationalism of Modernity.

Though we recognise the diversification in relation to the consecutive Western world(view)s it is perhaps better to work with an understanding that enables us to speak about the world(view)s across the Earth. Caputo puts forward the sacral, secular and post-secular, which we have already made liberal use of.

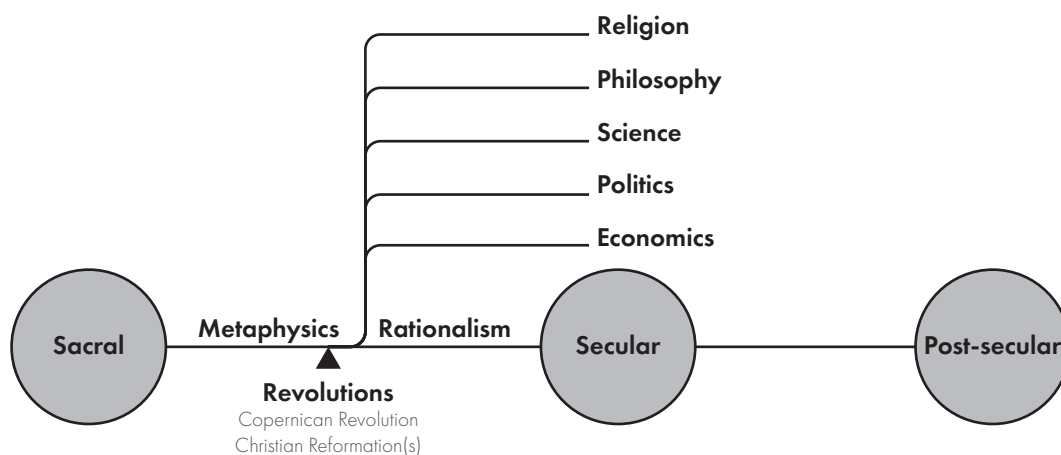


Diagram 3.1.4 Three consecutive world(view)s

List 3.1.4 Three consecutive world(view)s.

- 3.1.4.1. **The sacral age.** Where society is governed by the religious (Caputo 2001: 38) and “religious” is not a dirty word. Here the individual lives in relation to a given idea of God and seeks the God they know about (Caputo 2001:39-42).
- 3.1.4.2. **The secular age.** Here logic or reason prevails and we no longer begin with a “given” with regard to God or society (Caputo 2001: 42). Here the world is divided between the

“religious” and “secular” (Caputo 2001:43). It is here that the notion of what exists has to do with whether it exists objectively or is predicated - between whether it is there or whether we agree upon it and shape our lives in relation to our agreements (Caputo 2001:44). It is here that science becomes about the material world as objectively independent of the viewer that becomes the subject of science and religion relegated to the subjective and internal world of persons (Caputo 2001:44-45). Here God “ceases to exist” as an objective reality and comes to exist only within the hearts and minds of the believer as subjectively produced. Caputo (2001:55-56) notes that:

“By the end of the nineteenth century God was indeed all but dead to the intellectuals. Religious faith had become scientifically dubious (Darwin), psychoanalytically twisted (Freud), and cosmically and politically reactionary (Marx), while Kierkegaard was saying Christian faith represented a leap into the absurd. The view from the pews was largely unshaken by all this. Modernity had no spiritual vision to offer in the place of the one it had torn down, which is perhaps why religion still prospered among the poor and uneducated rank and file in the churches. But religion was dead or dying fast among its learned despisers as science progressed and the general level of learning rose.”.

Christianity seems to build its contemplative spirituality off this very foundation. We shall consider this later.

- 3.1.4.3. **Post-secular.** In the new and emerging world(view) we find “faith flourishing without metaphysical backup” and the question of God returning to people (Caputo 2001:56-57). Here we see the “metaphysical recuperation of the *pre*-metaphysical situation of faith” (Caputo 2001:58). Here people are not returning to the established religions but looking to live their lives as guided by their questioning and yearning for the deeper and more to life and of love. Here the-death-of God is also the-death-of absolute truth and metaphysics (Caputo 2001:59). An emerging people now seeks a new way of being after the sacral and secular ages (Caputo 2001:69). It is a world(view) where people are as suspicious of pre-modern sacral metaphysics as it is of modern and secular certainties (Caputo 2001:66).

3.1.5 DIVERSIFICATION

An inevitable result of moving away from metaphysics as given in revelation or available and purely attained by reason toward rationalism as determining the meaning and validating what is true from below. Inevitably this results in the diversification of religious world(view)s that takes place within the family and society as the core paradigms change. Here we transition from politics and religion as given and universal in the sacral age to membership in formally constituted institutions and not-for-profit businesses in the secular age.

3.1.5.1 RELIGIOUS DIVERSIFICATION FAMILIES

Within the same family or household one generation can easily be the modernizing generation wrestling with their traditional faith in a modern world(view) while their children, the next generation, may include a number of different individuals commuting daily between that modernizing sacral world(view) within the family to the public world(view) of the secular age. One household can include a generation born in the sacral age, now aged and passing, who parent a new generation born in a secular age, and even a third generation born in the post-sacral age.

Several generations of people may hold to and commute between different world(view)s daily. Here with traditional, modern and modernizing world(view)s coexisting however precariously and supportive in relation to each other. The following model can as easily represent a Christian family, whether Catholic or Protestant, as it can a family rooted in African Traditional Religion, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism. We model this diversification within the family in *Diagram 3.3.6 Religious diversification within families* below. As below, we model the diversification from modernizing to modern where *Generation 1* are parents who live with a sacral world(view) who parent *Generation 2* as raised within the home within that sacral world(view) while commuting, often daily, to the public secular world(view) where they are educated and work.

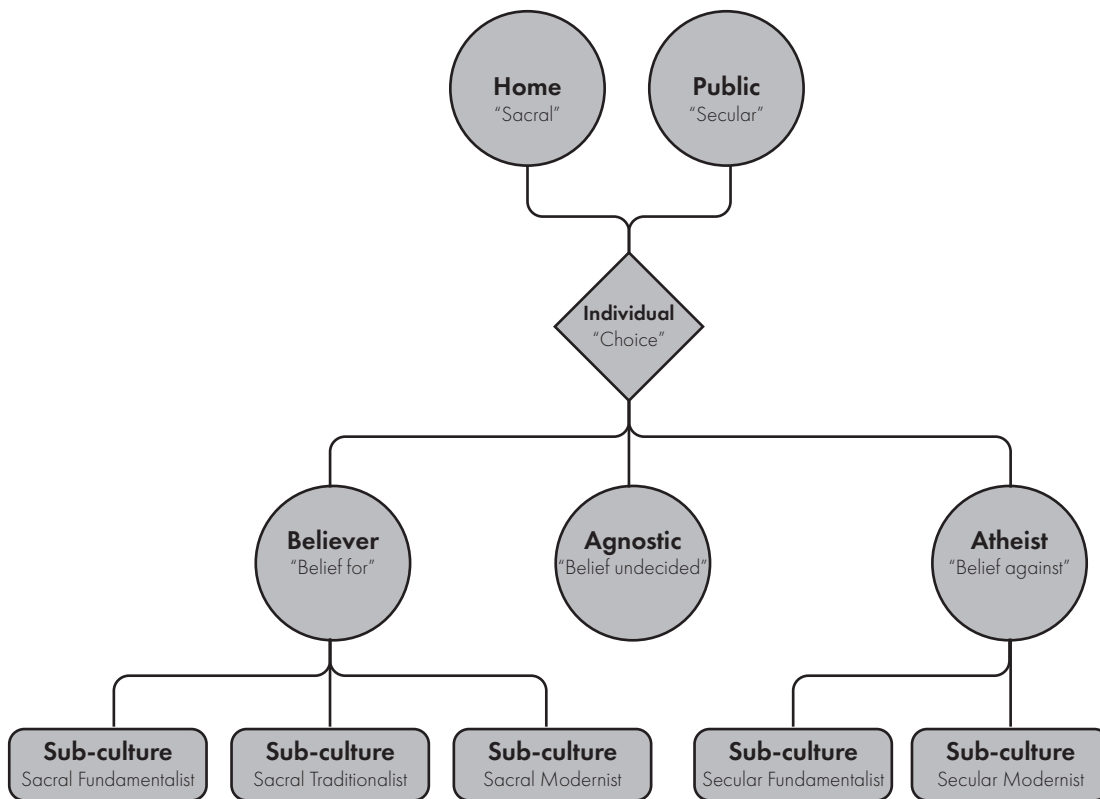


Diagram 3.1.5.1 Religious diversification within families

Let's explore the diagram above. We find two world(view)s co-existing – the sacral world(view) in the home and the secular world(view) at large. The individual raised and commuting between the two is challenged to work out what they believe in a secular world(view) characterised by choice and opportunity. In turn that individual may choose to become a believer as in choosing the 'belief for' their god-concept as provided within the family and religious world(view)s. Yet they could as easily choose to be 'undecided and agnostic' or choose to be an atheist as a choice to 'believe against' the religious world(view)s they inherit.

Yet this is further complicated. As sub-cultures of believers can consist of 'sacral fundamentalists', 'sacral traditionalists' and 'sacral modernists'. Each is a distinct collection of paradigms prioritizing the sacral and secular in different ways. Similarly, the atheist can be a 'secular fundamentalist' perhaps embracing a strong anti-theism or a 'secular modernist' to whom religion is an anomaly they can appreciate without having to work against.

What is important here is understanding that such differences in world(view) can co-exist in close proximity to each other and yet people can not only see the world in different ways but go about living in the world in completely different ways.

3.1.5.2 RELIGIOUS DIVERSIFICATION IN SOCIETY

Within society the transition from traditional world(view) to modern world(view) though successive is paradigmatically significant. Where the traditional world(view) integrates all aspects of life and politics, science and religion are rolled into one, the modern world(view) distinguishes them and considers their relative lack of scientific knowledge to mean that they are equally uneducated politically and religiously because they are somehow wrong at the scientific foundation of their faith. During this process the practice of faith transitions from the public centre of life to the specialised sideline while the common, or public, life becomes secular and anything related to faith and religion shifts from the public governance of society toward the private life and practices of the individual.

The transition from sacral to secular age and world(view) is a complete revolution rather than innovative, development¹⁴. The result is a secularization¹⁵ that is as much a desacralisation of the common life and the establishment of discrete specializations of social institutions. Here both monarchy and church, as expressions of Empire, are segregated from public, and now secular as opposed to religious, life. There is thus a distinction between the interest of the public as all people and that of the monarchy or church in a sacred and secular. The result is that each is constituted anew.

Though modernization results in a marked distinction between the modern and traditional world(view)s as eras, there is not only a separation of religion from the public life of all but also the diversification of religious world(view)s within a modernizing and modern society takes place in and in relation to modernity as world(view). The adaptation of religions to the modern era and world(view) takes place as both innovation and revolution. Religions are highly innovative and adaptive and find many ways to continue within a modern world.

This diversification, and the continuing relevance of religion, is argued for by the religious and seeded into a secular society through continued provision of goods and services as representing God. This continuing of relevance goes alongside the now irrelevance of religion as somewhat enabling each other. There is a handover between the goods, services and products of the faiths and the sciences.

Religious diversification takes place generally as modelled in *Diagram 3.1.5.2 Religious diversification* with society below.

14 A complete exploration of diversification lies beyond the anatheistic focus of this dissertation, leaving much room for research into modernity as it challenges religion in modernizing world(view) s.

15 Secularization is a complex process and phenomenon that has been explored by sociologists and historians, but our goal is here not to explore the details of the process. Here we reflect on the process as theoretically relevant to anatheistic conversations.

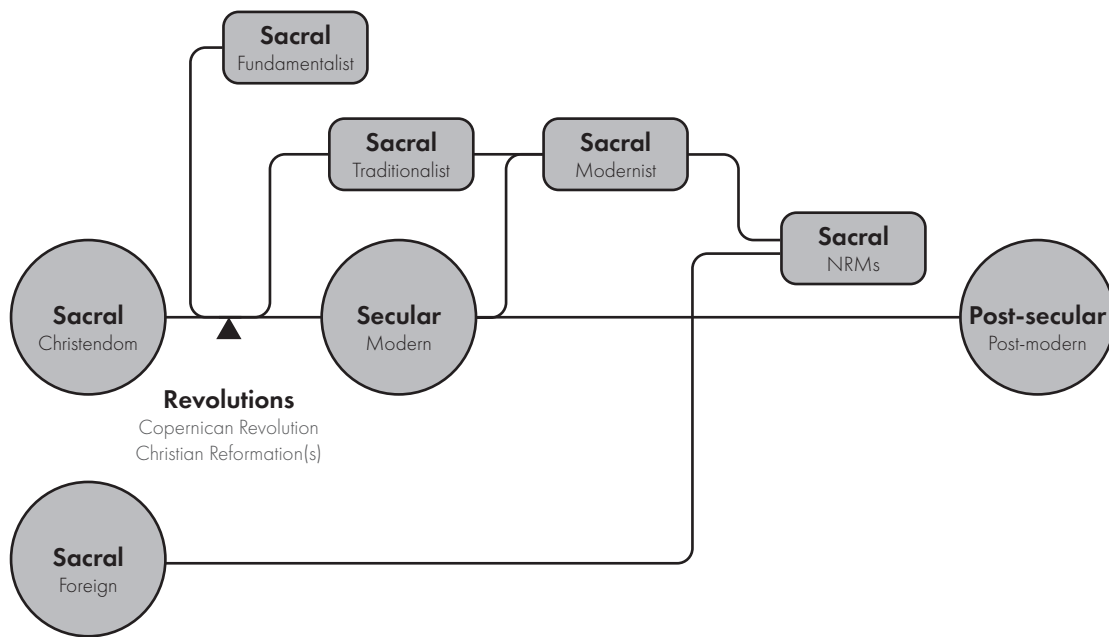


Diagram 3.1.5.2 Religious diversification within society

List 3.1.5.2 Religious diversification in modern society

- 3.1.5.2.1 **A traditional expression of their sacral/premodern religion.** These sacral world(view)s can be various primal religions such as those of Africa, for example the Zulu worship of Unkulunkulu, and those of the Native American Peoples, such as the Hopi worship of Tara, the sun spirit as creator, or the Lakota worshipping Inyan as the named equivalent of the Hopi. It can also be one the world's great religions such as the Indian worship of the supreme spirit *Brahma* or the equivalent 'voidness' or 'emptiness' of Therevāda Buddhist as *suññatā* and Mahāyāna Buddhist as *Śūnyatā*, and the creator gods of the monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which all lay claim to their respective 'God' as God – whether 'God' as the Yahweh of the Old Testament and Judaism, 'God' as the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) of later Christian theology, and Allah as 'God' of Islam¹⁶. In their own way each of these, and the various other sacral religions, share a common equaliser in the crucible of modernity. Within every secularizing world(view) we find sacral religious communities refusing to secularise and who see modernity as an enemy of faith, beliefs, practices, values, culture, heritage, etc. Here the personal religions, as in the religion of persons engaging transcendent Persons, are particularly vulnerable while impersonal traditions, such as the Buddhocentric stream of faiths, find an ancient-modern parallel in the rejection of gods and faith. And though many personal faiths find their way forward to coexist and thrive within a broader secular age, there is a fundamentalist stream characterised

¹⁶ Though our focus here is on Christianity it is not unaware of the deconstructionist approach where Derrida, for example, is 'religious sans religion' or 'religious without religion'.

perhaps by a militant rejection of secularism, such as the fundamentalist expression of Islam or Christianity, but mostly by a return to, say teaching the scriptures literally with creationism serving as example from Christianity. In this sense, we can readily healthy expression of traditional/premodern/sacral religion as values influencing behaviour and relationships which do not make headlines as well as unhealthy and dangerous expressions which do. In general, militant fundamentalism is truly an edge case while conceptual and attitudinal fundamentalism proves more enduring and pervasive.

3.1.5.2.2 **A modernised expression of their sacral/premodern religion.** Modernizing world(view)s do not only retain a sacral religion that refuses to update itself in relation to the secular age or in edge cases militantly oppose secularism, but also finds a new expression of their sacral world(view) as a modern or modernised religion. Here the sacral world(view) is updated within and in relation to the secular world(view), shifting from sacral pre-modern expression to modern. Here Christianity reconstituted in a complex manner first as a unified post-Nicaean religion within the Roman Empire toward Christendom and the church and then again, more recently, as a diversely fragmented faith in its post-Christendom expression as Catholicism and Protestantism. Here Catholicism and Protestantism are both orthodoxies developed in and in relation to modernity as era and world(view), in turn making way for newer and more innovative modern expressions of the church.

3.1.5.2.3 **The emergence of a religious expression as uniquely modern and secular.** Modernity also finds its own religious expression wherein atheism and secularism become religious and a form of spirituality, meaning not that they register as official religions but that they stands not only as religious position or but as proponents of their world(view) that tells stories related to sacral world(view). Here the fideistic belief ‘that God is’ has transitioned to the fideistic belief that ‘God is not’ as the consensus of the people. And even though this is the case, we adopt traditional practices and beliefs only to neuter them of their foundations in order to commercialise and commodify them. Here, by way of example, *yoga* and *mindfulness* have become a new expression in the secular age as somewhat distinct from their vital place within the sacral age of Hinduism and Buddhism. And though they may be culturally flavoured there is perhaps little is retained beyond linguistic depth. Instead, each becomes a modern and secular phenomenon that is part of the self-maintenance and self-management of people with zero concern for (1) the Self-realization that the self is in fact ‘the Self’ as in *Brahma*; (2) *Enlightenment*, that the self is in fact neither the self that is the self nor the self that is the Self, but is rather *Śūnyatā*,¹⁷ meaning that within there is no self at all; or (3) the *Self-revelation* (*Śekṣinā*) of Christ as Lord and saviour.

17 The usage of *Śūnyatā* (shoon-ya-ta) in this dissertation is not without regard for the differences between the Sanskrit

3.1.5.2.4 **The development of new religious movements.** The emergence of new religious movements in the secular age have been as either imported from one world(view) into another world(view), or have originated in their modernised context as new expressions of earlier religions, with faiths like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, etc.¹⁸ all wrestling within the same modern and modernizing era and world(view) as Calvinists and Lutherans alongside Anglicans and Catholics for what Christianity 'is'. Here perhaps the impact of modernization and modernity on Africa, by way of example, unsettles traditional African Religion. And where traditional African religions struggle with modernization and modernity, people may readily convert to Christianity as Christian has long been presenting anew as a modern religion. Similarly, where Christianity has been pitted against science there is much encouragement for Buddhism finding science a valuable evangelistic partner to Christians struggling between their sacral and modern expressions. Here traditional premodern and sacral religion may be considered as flailing within the secular age while being challenged by the arrival and developments of other faiths already well adapted to the challenges of modernity.

3.1.5.2.5 **Anatheism as the return, reconsideration or reopening of the question of God.** The conversation explored here is not a conversation in relation to sacral, modern or new religious movements but rather a post-religious *ana*-theism as in a new or return to the question in the context of Christianity. It is a conversation intentionally focused on those done with religion and who seek not to return to the religions already established or even to establish a new religion.¹⁹ As such, it is a new expression of the problem of God²⁰ not as tied to our Christianity but instead to our humanity.

3.1.5.3 PROGRESSIONS

We have, in a short space of time, transitioned from one earth at the centre of the universe with one sun, 6 planets and forty-two constellations made up of stars set against a crystalline sphere in the 1500s till the 2000s where the next generation of the *Sloan Digital Sky Survey* (SDSS-V) is a project where a global project includes numerous professionals work together across both hemispheres and

(*Śūnyatā*) and Pali (*suññatā*) as respectively developed and used by Mahāyāna and Theravāda schools of Buddhism, or perhaps better Buddhisms.

18 In this dissertation our attention is not on arguing for one expression of Christianity over another, nor to discern and unhealthy cults, or the like. Instead we simply recognise that modernity enables religious diversification through diverse influences. These can be exported, as in missionary activities, or imported, as when travelling to another geographic world(view) and bringing faiths and their practices back.

19 We make a play in the next chapter of this dissertation at recognizing a broach anatheistic conversation taking place in relation to the Christianity of the modern world(view). The word "*anatheism*" is borrowed from Richard Kearney, to whom we give some attention also in the next chapter.

20 The reader is likely to spring to the problem of God as in the Christian proofs and theodicy, but this *anatheism* is a new conversation. As it proceeds it may touch on such, but this is a matter of spirituality as relationship and not the spirituality of theology or philosophy.

including the “Milky Way Mapper, the Black Hole Mapper and the Local Volume Mapper”²¹. and includes five large scale telescopes, two spectrographs with over five hundred robots tracking a small selection of the two-hundred-and-fifty-million visible stars, with that small selection a staggering six million stars. Yet the formal program makes place for individual contributions through making its database publicly available²². The scientific revolution begun with the Copernican Revolution has not simply continued but has also evolved exponentially in capacity.

The *scientific revolution* is not limited to astronomy and the hard sciences alone going back to the Copernican Revolution but ongoing. There are further developments in the physical, biological and social sciences of these with perhaps evolutionary theory remaining as a strong point of contention between religious fundamentalists and scientific fundamentalists. The implications of Gotama and Christ stand alongside those of Copernicus and Darwin and resound in the 'God after God' conversations. There is a progression in our knowledge not only in the hard *sciences* but also in the *humanities*, including our study of ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’.

The practical complexity increases in all our scientific endeavours, including our investigations into religion and spirituality. Here the scientific method is applied equally to philosophical, theological and historical research and activities from within with Christian conservatives making some form of stand toward and against Christian fundamentalism and liberalism. Speaking relativistically, each may be contributing synoptically towards Christianity as it is today. However, the paradigmatic centre of each is what Krüger invites us to explore what we mean by God as in our “god-concepts” (1989:49) And with Derrida, what is it to be a Christian, or Jew, as the church as the people of God apart from a geopolitical Judaism and Christianity as repeating the “covenant in a religion without religion” (1997: xx-xxi). It is important to accept that the fundamentalism we find amidst modern Christianity is a response to the modern era and modernity world(view) and not necessarily representative of the preceding Christian faith. It is also codependent in relation to conservatism and liberalism who each support themselves in relation to the other. Furthermore, the shift to orthodoxy is a significant paradigm shift foundational enabling first Christendom and then the formal Church paradigm as central to Christianity.

It is to our models of consecutive world(view)s as a society wherein Christianity is itself a world(view) stemming from the consecutive world(view)s of Christians, that we couple the key scientific progressions within the consecutive western world(view)s as modelled in *Diagram 3.1.5.3 Scientific progressions* below.

21 <https://www.sdss.org/press-releases/sdss5/>

22 Juna Kollmeier, *The Most detailed map of galaxies*, TED Channel on YouTube.

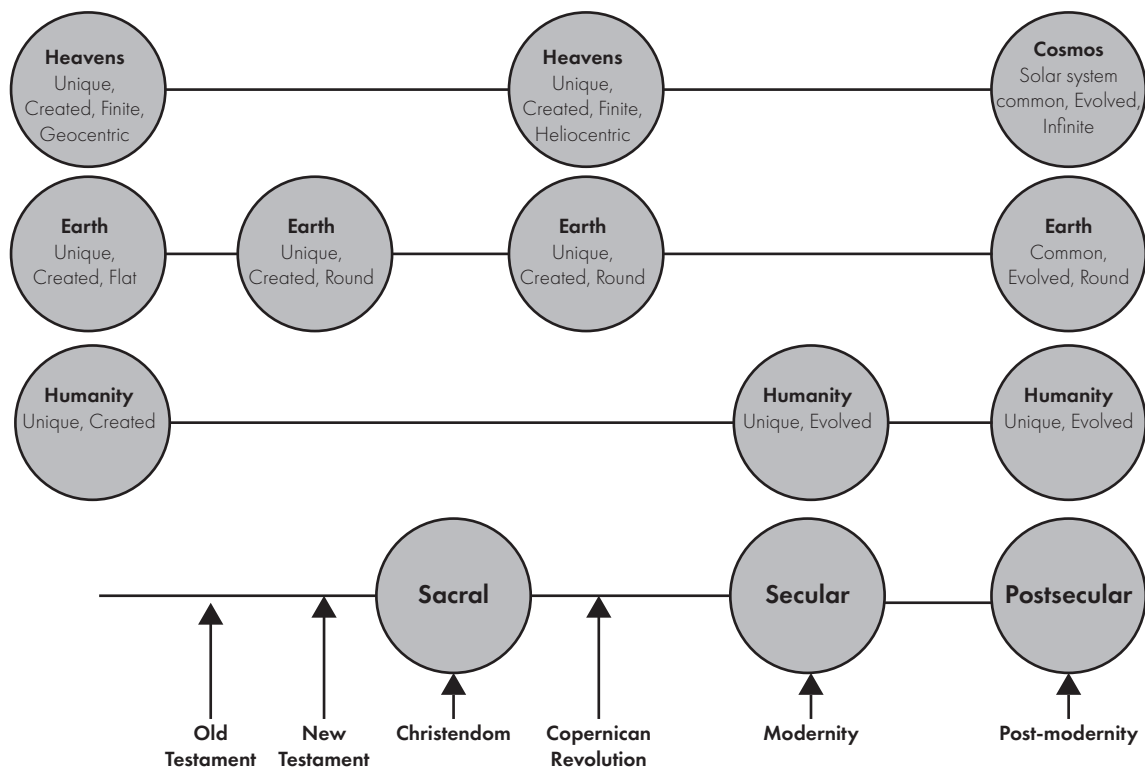


Diagram 3.1.5.3 Progressions

What is important in the diagram above is the recognition that a singular faith, such as Christianity, can be expressed in and through various consecutive world(view)s. The progressions are, however, not entirely synchronised between world(view)s. The western world(view) modernised from within and following the Copernican Revolution. Other world(view)s come to experience the same transition from sacral to secular along with their own diversifications in economics, politics, science, philosophy and religion within society and the family.

3.2 THE-DEATH-OF GOD

Though Nietzsche announces Modernity's *requiem æternam deo* or "prayer for God as one recently deceased" this is based on developments in the modern world and the modern world(view). As summarised by Nietzsche (2010: loc.1443-1445/6623):

"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred

games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"

This announcement is based on the divorce between science and religion during and around the Copernican Revolution. The world that was once completely religious as Christendom is by Nietzsche's time secular. God has long been silent and absent and now declared dead. This death took place possibly earlier with Christianity as having imbibed Aristotle's science and Plato's philosophy and the emerging science of the secular age as relieving itself from metaphysics along with the Monarchy and Pope of the sacral age. This conversation and theology develop further toward Christian churches serving as tombs and monuments to a God who is not only dead, but perhaps never existed to begin with. But there is an ongoing or returning question of God that dogs the death-of-God theology.

The-death-of God takes place in the Copernican Revolution and takes time for the implications to work its way through politics, philosophy and religion.

3.2.1 MODERN PHILOSOPHERS

Here we have a lineage of thinkers including Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger who are followed by Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney. And each, following the-death-of God, embrace a contextual hermeneutic encouraging people to think past and through the world(view) they have inherited to engage deeply with life and living.

Cupitt moves to a non-realist view of God (Cupitt 2011: loc.890/2281) as a point of departure for thinking about mysticism 'after' Modernity. The-death-of God is an idea, according to Cupitt, popular since the French Revolution and the philosophies of Kant and Schopenhauer, where Western philosophy permanently breaks away from God. By then humanity is "not the inhabitant of a fixed divine framework for his life, but rather as the maker of his own knowledge, his own history and his own social order" (Cupitt 2011: loc.492-525/2281). Here people finally break politically with the world(view) of Christendom as culminating in the French Revolution and with the religion of Christianity and its God with the-death-of God. Yet, according to Cupitt, the "full impact of the Death of God would be felt by the late twentieth century" (Cupitt 2011: loc.492-525/2281).

But this is also the death-of-all Grand Narratives, as in anything capitalised. Cupitt (2011: loc.492-525/2281) reflects that:

"Sometimes I confess that I still love the dead God, just as I still love my dead parents. Most recently, I have begun trying to break away from the remnants of the idea of God as an infinite substance. Instead I see God as 'God everliving and everdying', a burning process, the outpouring and the utter transience of everything, into which we plunge and now which

we pass joyfully away. As a new religious symbol I like, not only the Sun and the Fountain, but also the dancers of Henri Matisse. See also Everything is a Period Piece."

Here Caputo notes that, for him "The play is all." (Caputo 1987: 293). The death-of-God theology "remains relevant today" (Lombaard and Biernot 2018:10). For here thinkers such as Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney encourage us "but way of awakening to the play of the flux and hence of staying in the play oneself... after 'owning up' to the elusiveness which envelops us all ... to let all things—gods, earth, and mortals—be" (Caputo 1987: 293).

This is not as a return to Christendom and its metaphysics. Nor is it a preservation and argument for Christianity as Catholicism and Protestantism within the secular age. The death-of-God theology is furthered as the returning question of God perhaps best expressed in the thinking of Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney. It is with them in mind that we explore the question of what Christianity 'is' after the sacral age in the secular age. And even as Postmodern philosophers touch on the theology of the kingdom of God and the mystery thereof, they do not necessarily touch on the mysticism of the kingdom. Instead our exploration of the returning question of God follows on from the death-of-God not as returning us to the sacral religions and fundamentalisms and conservatisms but as a renewed and new questioning.

Cupitt invites us to consider what mysticism 'is' after the secular age, to a recovery of mysticism before and within the secular age, and Kearney helps us recognise the question as returning after the secular age. And here the question returns not as returning us to Christendom 'before' the secular age or as supporting Christianity as Catholicism and Protestantism 'within' the secular age but afresh and anew after the secular age. Here: Cupitt focuses on the lack of metaphysics and recapturing a religion without religion; Caputo directs us toward a retrieval and repetition of being religious without religion; And Kearney lends voice to what being religious without religious is as the present-continuous event of inviting, waiting upon and welcoming the Stranger who draws near in Person.

The problem with world(view)s and our commuting between world(view)s is that two people standing on the same point on the earth at the same time can see entirely different worlds. The returning question of God for the secularist and modern Christian is completely different even as it is for the post-secularist seeking to be religious 'sans' or without religion. But where (1) the secularist may seek a world where God has been completely forgotten and (2) the modern Christian to return the world to its governance, the (2) post-secularist seeks a world 'after' both the sacral and secular ages. This question is particularly challenging to those committed to secularism and Christianity as Catholicism and Protestantism. But their challenges are not the primary concerns of the post-secular. Instead, their concern lies with the absence of God in the secular age and within Christianity therein. And as the post-secular emerge from the secular world(view), we gain an understanding of God's absence in relation to that secular world(view) and the pluralism of modern religions therein.

In the-death-of God theology God is viewed as silent, absent and dead in the sense of never having existed to begin with. Yet here we can (1) return to living without God or (2) remain open to the mystery or (3) repeat the invitation, wait upon and respond to the Stranger becoming present in Person. This is, perhaps as noted by Westphal in reference to Kearney, ‘*anatheism* as a work of philosophy and not theology’ (Westphal in Kearney 2016: loc.231/287).

3.2.2 NON-REALISM

The line of reasoning takes us to a non-realist view of God, meaning that the relationship with God is psychologically real but the ontological fabric of God is imaginative. God exists within the heart and mind of the believer but not as a Person ‘out there’. Or perhaps it is that God can exist as such, but also exists as a transcendent Person?

According to Cupitt (1984: loc. 3756/5689), modernity is “unhistorical and unsustained by the presence of tradition, it is both impoverished and sinful”. It is unhistorical as well represented in the shift from art as the “public symbolic communication celebrating public myths” from religion to the state and its institutions (Cupitt 1984: loc.3739/5689). And here religion has come to be understood as an “ever-changing human product” (Cupitt 1984: loc.3788/5689) with them all equally true. Yet we no longer live in a secular world where the world is viewed as solid but viewed as fluid. It has become increasingly clear that ‘the discoveries of the modern scientific world are in fact inventions’ and therewith Cupitt (1984: loc.3788-3804/5689) notes that:

“long-established belief that there is an objective world-order that embodies just one intellectual structure, or (in the Kantian version) that the world can only be known as objective in so far as it is made to conform to the requirements of just one intellectual structure, at last broke down. It became increasingly clear that all theories are not discoveries but inventions, human imaginative constructions that are imposed upon experience and can be described as ‘true’ only in the sense that, and for so long as it is found that, they work usefully. To put it brutally, there is no ready-ordered objective reality any more: there is only the flux of becoming, and continuing ever-changing human attempts to imagine and impose order. We have to make sense, we have to turn chaos into cosmos.”

In fact, we do not only “copy or trace the structure of a pre-existing independent reality out there” but instead build our world and view of the world as world(view) therewith (Cupitt 1984: loc.4328/5689). Hence all our language is symbolic (Cupitt 1984: loc.4344/5689) and practical (Cupitt 1984: loc.4360). With Wittgenstein we see a shift Plato’s Being and how to get there from the imperfect emanations

thereof to Descartes knowledge, and how to acquire it, to meaning, and how to attain it (Cupitt 1984: loc.4443/5689) that represents the shift from the modern to the postmodern world(view).

According to Cupitt (1984: loc.4066/5689), Nietzsche's the-death-of God is "more than simply dogmatic atheism" and means "nihilism" in the sense that everything is made and un-made and re-made by people and for people. It is, democratic. And so, "in the end nothing exists except the range of possible forms of consciousness before us, and the need to choose what to make of our lives" (Cupitt 1984: loc.4098/5689). We must "renounce the illusions of metaphysics and accept the primacy of the practical and of our common life" as derived not only from the "Judeo-Christian tradition" but all the world's traditions (Cupitt 1984: loc.4500/5689).

Modern spirituality as secular and contemplative is tremendously similar to Wittgenstein as described by Cupitt (1984: loc.4241/5689) that it is in the sense of:

"a highly inner-directed person who needed before all else to satisfy his own conscience. To such a person believing in God and doing God's will means the same thing as being inwardly free from falsity, having a right sense of oneself and one's own life, and living a life that is both free and dedicated. Intellectual truthfulness must from and rest upon something more fundamental, moral truthfulness"

It is Wittgenstein along with Kant that fixes the limits of knowledge in order to make room for faith. Here what's known is known and what is unknown is known by means of faith. And the trade-off is with making religious beliefs non-factual (Cupitt 1984: loc.4257/5689). Here "faith in God can shape your life, without its being necessary to suppose that God exists objectively 'out there'". Here we have the layman's concept of religious belief (Cupitt 1984: loc.4293/5689). And as such, the belief moves toward "non-realism" (Cupitt 1984: loc.4533/5689) and God interpreted as a "guiding ideal, not given in experience but instead functioning as the ultimate focus and goal of our intellectual and moral life" (Cupitt 1984: loc.4549/5689). Here God comes to mean the human idea of God and as projected from the self, God is the Self (Cupitt 1984: loc.4549). The God-image then lies within the human psyche. It "does not matter if the ordinary person does not make a clear distinction between mystical and ontological realities... provided that he can use it to convey the true inward meaning of God" (Cupitt 1984: loc.4549/5689).

There is thus a shift in the "perception of religious meanings" along with a shift from religious "truth" to religious "meaning" (Cupitt 1984: loc.4564/5689). In the 20th century religion has "become entirely human" (Cupitt 1984: loc.4595/5689).

Cuppitt (1984: loc.4738/5689) notes that we do not have to choose a “nostalgic realist theology” and that:

“This ‘Copernican revolution’ as Kant called it, spelled the end of the old realist metaphysical notion of God. The objective God of realism was inseparably bound up with the idea of an objective and eternal cosmic order. When that order came to be seen as a human product, when for example it was realized that scientific theories are not discoveries but inventions, then the God of realism came to be seen as a mythic projection of the human mind. Feuerbach, Marx and others could regard the believer’s objective God only as his own magnified mirror-image. To them it seemed that religious belief was necessarily precritical in outlook, for it insisted on crediting God with cosmos-ordering and legislative powers that Kant had proved to be in fact our own.”

And now, according to Cupitt (1984: loc.4783/5689), the notion of “my God” is “an expression of my spiritual commitment to my life-aim” and therefore Cupitt (1984: 4873/5689) can argue that:

“Critical thinking begins with the theory of knowledge and is typically anthropocentric in outlook. It accepts without complaint the fact that human knowledge is after all just human knowledge, man-made, provisional, fallible. What else could it be? And the correct attitude to theory is neither sceptical nor dogmatic, but pragmatic. We must have theories, but each and every theory is no more than a tool with a limited range of usefulness. Critical thinking seeks emancipation from the tyranny of theories that have become dogmas. Its spirit is light, supple, clearheaded and mobile, like Wisdom in ancient Judaism, and the Tao in China.”

Since the mid-nineteenth century Christian doctrine is also viewed as “a human expression, with a human history which can be traced in great detail as critical historical research displays the cultural settings, the human need and the power-interests that produced and established it” (Cuppitt 1984: loc.4934/5689).

Cuppitt agrees with Caputo and Kearney in that he does not “think that practice of religion has to depend upon the acceptance of a body of dogmatic beliefs” (Cuppitt 1984: loc.4949/5689). The result is that “the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian is no longer a disagreement about beliefs but has become simply a difference in spirituality” (Cuppitt 1984: loc.5089/5689). The distinction is one of the aesthetic expressions of spirituality and where it is anchored. As such, following the Copernican Revolution the beliefs of modern society and religion come slowly tumbling down. There is thus no longer anything objective impressed upon us but instead everything is produced in

relation to and for people. The result is that “ethics comes first and religion is our way of representing to ourselves, and renewing our commitment to, the complex moral and spiritual values through which we shape our world, constitute ourselves, gain our identity and give worth to our lives” (Cupitt 1984: loc.5186/5689). The meaning of God is then religious and not metaphysical, an ideal embodying our values and ethics and not an objective person (Cupitt 1984: loc.5199/5689). Where the “earlier forms (of religion) tended to be more collectivist; its newer forms are more concerned with self-realization” (Cupitt 1984: loc.5261). As further expressed by Cupitt (1984: loc.5261-5276/5689:

“As it has progressed so the old dogmatic consolations, with their outworn associated structures of oppressive social and psychological power, are inevitably passing away. But the historic task of religion, of embodying our values, witnessing to them, conserving them, setting them forth in symbols and securing their realization in human life, remains unchanged. It will be performed all the better when the painted veil of illusion, that has hitherto hidden its workings, has finally dropped.”

3.3 CONCLUSION

The modern philosophers bring us to an awareness of our world(view)s and the limitation of the thinker therein. And they make us aware of the hermeneutic challenges associated with interpreting thinkers in different world(view)s even if those world(view)s precede theirs. Here, by way of example, there is a monumental shift from the-idea-of God in the pre-modern sacral world(view) of Christendom to the-idea-of God in the secular age and our modern era. What is not clear is the degree to which the-idea-of God of the sacral world(view)s must also be considered as non-real; or even that the modern secular distinction between the God-concept as real and non-real needs to be maintained. Nevertheless, the modern world(view) holds to an objective non-realism with regard to the existence of God. What it means to believe in God is to hold to the objective realism of God apart from experiencing God as an objective reality. Instead, God is experienced as psychologically real. Those who have 'faith' do not rely on engaging God as objectively real. Instead, Tradition and Scripture and the institutional church are taken as the concrete or objective foundations of faith.

This brief overview of modern philosophy brings us to the quest for what mysticism ‘is’ and thereafter what Christian ‘is’ in the secular age. Here we will see Essentialism support the objective non-realism of God and Christianity the psychological realism.

Modern mysticism

The various ‘God after God’ conversations are set within the modern era. Here there is a remarkable difference between the sacral world(view) of Christendom and the modern world(view) that succeeds it in the secular age. And though it is in the process of being succeeded by a post-secular world(view), the ‘God after God’ conversations take place late within the secular world(view) as having let go of the God-concept of Christendom. Within the secular era there is a quest for what mysticism ‘is’ as people wrestle with the depths of religion, their social expression and historical development, within a world(view) that may host but no longer supports sacral world(view)s.

The modern quest for what mysticism ‘is’ kicks off with an early essentialism and thereafter continues between Constructivists and Essentialists. The Constructivists provide a rebuttal to early essentialism on the basis of generalizations and a lack of proper grounding in the actual mystical texts and insufficient hermeneutic. Yet recent Essentialists have, perhaps inadvertently and deliberately, countered the Constructivists with some serious research. These later researchers do not, however, explore Christian mysticism by relying on the texts of Christian mysticism. They, oddly, do precisely what they accuse Constructivists of doing. They do, however, offer a Buddhocentric understanding of mystical experience as the cornerstone of all mystical experience and identify like introspective practices in all religions leading to contemplative universals.

4.1 EARLY ESSENTIALISM

Kourie explains the phases in the study of mysticism (1992) starting with William James (1842-1910) covering “religious experience” from without and broadly, guided by the needs and requirements of the social sciences (1902) while Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) focused on mystical experience from within, with the lens of passionate devotee focusing her work (1911). Bridgers notes that each emphasised and set the research on two different trajectories – James the head and Underhill the heart (2012:27-28). In retrospect their contributions are complementary whilst simultaneously symptomatic of modernity which stresses objectivity and description over personal experience with the former viewed as objective and reliable and set against the latter as subjective and unreliable. Mysticism has then from the very beginning been defined less clearly and specifically than generally. These works were followed by Huxley’s *The perennial philosophy* (1945) and together mysticism has been

popularly defined in relation to their work and as somewhat at odds and ill-fitting with the sacral and secular world(view)s.

From the start the study of mysticism has focused on two different trajectories – studies contextualised around the multi-disciplinary sciences as objective and third-person explorations and studies contextualised around the practices of people engaging in first-person explorations. This author understands ‘mysticism’, ‘spirituality’, ‘experience’ and ‘religious experience’ somewhat as synonyms that collude with and elaborate on one another while have their own identities and that conversations with them must incorporate both third-person and first-person contributors. Yet, as Cupitt notes (Cupitt 2008:12), the very words used as “experience”, “religious experience”, “religion”, “spirituality” and “mysticism” are defined in modernity and have not well translated the meaning of those same words as used in other world(view)s. These words were defined by modern people in a modern world(view) for modern reasons and purposes. And the meaning of these words have shifted tremendously through history. Therefore, what religion ‘is’ varies from religion to religion and from sacral to secular ages within even the same religion (Krüger *et al.* 1996:3) along with what God ‘is’ (Krüger *et al.* 1996:4). What each of these ‘is’ cannot be limited to any one era alone. And their meaning cannot be reduced to a definition only accepted by Modernity. Each is a complex and diverse phenomenon connected as much to people as to their institutions and world(view) and even to the transcendent as impersonal and personal. As noted by van Kaam (van Kaam 1984:9), the religious and ideological faith traditions and their explanatory theories and philosophies make such ultimate meaning and symbols available in ways that ‘are not anti-rational but instead transrational as inspirational and applicable’ across consecutive world(view)s. Each, as noted by Krüger (2018: loc.544/13538), makes ‘religion’ a ‘world orientation’ with an ‘exceptionally radical and integral intention’ that is communal with respect to religion focusing on the social and historical accruals of faith and individual with regard to mysticism as individual spiritual practice oriented toward engagement with the transcendent. And it is in recognition of this commonality and the goals of modern thinkers that an early essentialism emerges and works its way into public thinking. This is countered late in the 20th century by constructivists.

The Constructivists mapped the range, nuance and diversity of mystical phenomena and experience resulting perhaps in a plurality of mysticisms as arising from the broader data recognised as mysticism. The Essentialists differ in seeking to identify whether there is a common core to all religion and what such a core may be. The result is that the Essentialist moves us toward an abstracted essentialism as a mysticism perhaps divorced from the actual mystics and certainly from their faiths while the Constructivists move us toward a concretised pluralism as mysticisms in the plural perhaps leading us away from what’s common and shared in values, practice and experience.

Where early essentialism is rooted in the work of James, Underhill and Huxley, it developed further and popularly and relies on the notion of a ‘*sui generis*’, meaning self-evident, ‘religious experience’.

And though for a while it seemed that such religious studies identified a common core to all religion, a shared and perennial experience and all religions and their mystics concluded to be doing the same essential thing and communicating a shared and essential message.

In turn the Constructivists mapped the landscape and found that the Essentialist assumptions did not faithfully represent the reports of the mystics. They explored *Mysticism and philosophical analysis* (1978), *Mysticism and language* (1992), and *Mysticism and sacred scripture* (2000). Here the Constructivists use the data of mystical reports to challenge the early essentialist assumption that there is a common mystical core shared across all religion. The early essentialist assumption that there is a common core, as critiqued by Constructivists, is not supported by the data and any such perennial assertion is therefore unfounded. Where the early essentialists pointed us toward a common experience through common practices the Constructivists showed that there are a variety of mysticisms and that within faith traditions that mystics play a conservative role. The Constructivists showed that the assumptions of the early essentialists are unfounded.

The dialectic tension between early essentialists and Constructivists continues into a new era that is not only a post-secular but also offers new academic paradigms such as spirituality as an academic field (cf. Waaijman 2002) and the more recent contemplative studies (cf. Komjathy 2018). Both spirituality as practice and mysticism as experience are receiving attention along with their connection to each other, their faiths, and other faiths. As this interest in spirituality and mysticism has evolved it has done so in keeping with scientific investigations into the neurobiology and social and hermeneutic contextuality of people and further explorations of religion enabling more recent Essentialists to respond to the Constructivists. It is necessary for us to understand the quest of the early essentialist and the quest of the Constructivist as sharing a common paradigmatic foundation within a particular but consecutive world(view) and that the 'God after God' conversations in relation to Christianity spirituality/mysticism may serve as a contribution to the early and recent Essentialist and Constructivist exploration of spirituality and mysticism even as they in turn contribute to Christian spirituality and the quest for what Christianity 'is'.

This is important considering the intersectionality of contemplative studies, early essentialism, Constructivism, spirituality, religion and mysticism as interrelated fields.

4.2 THE QUEST OF THE CONSTRUCTIVISTS

The Constructivists surely agree that the goals of mysticism are good but view the work of the contributors as “manifest strong biases and problematic presuppositions about what mysticism is and how it should be studied - biases which colour their investigations from the outset and which significantly diminish the value of their results” (Katz 1978:2). It is in light of this that the

Constructivists seek to address ‘technical work’ and related issues enabling an understanding of the mystical material itself.

Their quest is that of mapping the diversity of the mystical/spiritual phenomena. Where the early essentialist moves us toward an abstracted essentialism the constructivists move us toward a concretised pluralism, albeit lacking the confessional insights and specificity of the early essentialists. There is thus an insider-outsider reflection among the Buddhist-descended introversive mysticisms coupled with third-person reflection of the observer of religion as constructivist even if insider-outsider differing in the sense of the former’s practice in contrast with the latter. This has been highlighted by Komjathy (2018).

Constructivism, however, lacks the confessional impetus and insights of the essentialists as people of faith and mystical experience. There is thus an insider-outsider reflection among the Buddhist-descended and introspective mysticisms that couples well with the third-person outsider observation of religion as Constructivists. But the Constructivists, lacking the impetus of like confessionalism, are unable to discern the mystical experience in like manner. Nevertheless, Constructivism perhaps provides a better picture to us of what the diversity of mysticism may come to include. As noted by Katz (2000:3):

“The quest, for the Constructivists, appears to be the mapping of the diversity of the mystical/spiritual phenomena. This paradigm, which is most simply described as “contextualist” repudiated the older “early essentialist” model, which argued that (a) mystical experience was essentially independent of the sociocultural, historical, and religious context in which it occurred and (b) all mystical experience, at its highest and purest level, was essentially the same.”

4.2.1 SPECIFICS OVER GENERALISATIONS

The Constructivists are concerned with the generalisations of early essentialism with the concern that the mysticism it puts forward is too abstracted and generalised. The mysticism of the essentialist is either a new expression of mysticism or perhaps the reduction of mysticism to that of a particular world(view). In either case, it is not representative of the mysticism of all the world’s faiths. In the thinking of the Constructivist, the mysticism of Essentialism is not rooted in or representative of the wider phenomenon of mysticism and cannot be maintained.

Katz *et al.* differ from the Essentialist in understanding that the Christian seeking *Christ*, the Hindu seeking *Ātman-Brahman*, and the Buddhist seeking *Śūnyatā* don’t necessarily experience the same thing and lend their ultimate commitment to it. Though the Constructivists speak of contextual conditioning and mystical traditions guiding people to experiences, said traditions are not viewed as

determining such experience. Rather, the individual seeking *Christ* through Christianity and Christian mysticism as ascetic and contemplative stands a reasonable chance to encounter Him, or not, than *Ātman-Brahman* or *Śūnyatā*; the individual seeking *Ātman-Brahman* of encountering *Ātman-Brahman*, or not, and not *Christ* or *Śūnyatā*; and the individual seeking *Śūnyatā* of encountering *Śūnyatā*, or not, than *Ātman-Brahman* or *Christ*. The mystic and their tradition's intentionality along with their faith's guidance do not determine who or what they encounter while perhaps narrowing the odds through the efficacy of their tradition and the application of their practice along with the respective access to the impersonal and personal transcendent that is the object and focus of their respective faith traditions.

The Constructivists would surely agree that the mystics across traditions share common introspective itineraries, i.e. contemplative practices as interoceptive training, but would rather explicate than eradicate ergotrophic, ecstatic and visionary experiences. In the above example, the early essentialist would argue that *Christ* is somehow *Ātman-Brahman* while also *Śūnyatā* without necessarily being able to justify how they are the same. But would the ordained Christian priest or pastor agree? Would the Hindu temple priest or *Pujari* conducting worship agree? Would the ordained Buddhist monastic or *bhikkhu* agree? Certainly not. And their disagreement is not only because of their respective faiths and theological and institutional commitment. They may disagree based on *faith*, but this cannot by implication be taken to mean that they would agree based on first-hand *experience*. And though they would agree that there are commonalities, including practices and values and perhaps even that such experiences are one and the same, they would not necessarily be correct in so agreeing.

Yet to argue such without exploring the relationship of the mystic to their religious *text* is to “neglect the significance of sacred scriptures in the descriptive studies and the analytical discussions of these works” (Katz *et al.* 2000: 7). (Though this appears not to be the case in recent Essentialist works (cf. Rose 2016: loc.4440/8498)).

Constructivism therefore argues against early essentialism while making space for it; early essentialism argues against Constructivism and makes no space for it. And while there is agreement in introspective practices, early essentialism only arrives at a common core mysticism by radically delimiting what mysticism ‘is’. According to Smith (1983: 248), the Constructivists are clear that:

“there is no apprehension of what we have encountered or undergone which is not at the same time mediated in some form of expression, and the only forms of expression available are those which determine the individual's historical situation. Current discussions of the nature of scientific knowledge centre on the interpenetration of fact and theory; if this is so in fields where the greatest precision of thought is possible, how much more must it hold in the sphere of religion, and especially in mysticism, where there occurs a struggle to express what many believe cannot be said at all! We must rid ourselves of the illusion

that there is ‘raw’ experience and recognize unavailability of any experience which is not in some way expressed and interpreted”

There appears to be a confessional gap, nuance and impetus within the Constructivists as objective that may be addressed through the confessional nature of Christianity as spirituality, religion and mysticism. The Constructivists, who take a broad approach, lack the confessional anchoring of a faith such as Christianity. And therewith Constructivism lacks an insider’s conviction and invested exploration of the tension between their faith as religion and mysticism and therewith spirituality as tied to either or both or none. The quest for what mysticism ‘is’ has not been exhausted by the work of early essentialists and Constructivists and though the Christians mystics have been explored it is as text in context and in translation between world(view)s and not as first-hand mysticism taking place around us.

4.2.2 MYSTICISM AS DIVERSE PHENOMENON

Mysticism is then, perhaps, a diverse phenomenon in relation to *Ātman-Brahman*, to *Śūnyatā* and *Śekîṇâ*. Here Constructivists aim to preserve mysticism as distinctively expressed in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Yet the Constructivists work with texts rather than presently available mystics. Their work, however, is aimed at enabling researchers to allow the mystics to speak for themselves about their mystical experience. Constructivism is not aiming to read mystics selectively or reductionistically. Their aim is instead to understand and explain mysticism.

The Constructivists are then potentially Contextualists, meaning that the mystical experience is not understood as either singular but diverse. They recognise that the mystic constructs and articulates their mystical theology/philosophy in relation to the world(view) as standing within traditions and even serve as their exemplars. As such, they allow for a difference between the *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*) and *Self-revelation* (*Śekîṇâ*) without having the expectation that such needs to be conditionally co-constructed on an essential foundation.

4.3 THE QUEST OF THE ESSENTIALISTS

The quest, for the early Essentialists, appears to be:

1. To find something in common in people’s spiritual life despite the obvious differences between them. Finding the core, underlying and common or “essential” and foundational “experience” upon which religious thinking and institutions are developed. This desire is

rooted in the pluralism of and within religion as enabled by globalization and the desire to find some unity past all our divisions (cf. Katz 1978:1).

2. To find something to give meaning in light of the crisis stemming from Modernity. Finding the shared practices and habits that serve as formational, guiding practitioners across world(view)s toward that “essential experience”. This appears to be related to the broad existential crises of the 20th century (cf. Katz 1978:1) that have not been solved. Here these habits for living and caring for oneself and others also enable a deeper living beyond the consumerism and materialism of secular society.

The later Essentialists drive the early quest of the early essentialists further toward their objectives offering as understanding of the *essential experience* and *essential practices*.

4.3.1 ESSENTIAL EXPERIENCE

The Essentialists have become quite specific about what the essential experience is. This is by way of responding to the Constructivist critique. Of particular importance is the distinction between mystical texts and mystical experience and the preference for their experience over what is perhaps in the *text* of Christian mystics. Here the Constructivists may be seen to prefer mystical texts and the Essentialists mystical experience. The Essentialists do appear to focus on a Buddhocentric mystical experience to the exclusion of others, in particular theistic experience.

Where the Constructivists argued there to be no unmediated experiences the Essentialists argue that there is a common or essential experience. Forman, for instance, argues for a Pure Consciousness Event as that common core and therewith the maturing of the mystic toward a Dualistic Mystical State (1999). Forman identifies *Samādhi* or *Śūnyatā* as that experience and speaks of such as the Pure Consciousness Event and notes the development of a state of dual awareness resulting in functional everyday living whilst attuned to the Personal Consciousness Event, i.e. a Dualistic Mystical State. In turn, Forman asks that we delimit the boundaries of mystical experience and study of mysticism to introspective practices and experiences (1999:4-6). Though Forman acknowledges that the Constructivists link belief to experience (1999:45) the Essentialists request that ergotropic, ecstatic and visionary experiences not be considered as mysticism. The implication is that theistic experience and mysticism is effectively excluded on the basis of introversive experience being present. Here we then do find a common core to all mysticism as readily accessible and available contemplative practices and associated subjects albeit arriving at such through not admitting that which is intermittent and relational and which therefore proves problematic. We can measure the effects and processes taking place within the subject engaged in contemplative practice but can't reproduce or control the contributions of God as a third-party. We can place the practitioner of the contemplative in a

laboratory for observation but can't take that same collection of instruments and controls into the broader world. We also cannot reliably study theistic experience which appears to defy our capacity to control the experience and therefore replicate the experience.

Komarovski (2015: loc.569/6835) shows that emptiness as realised within the Tibetan Buddhism differs to the Personal Consciousness Event and that the causes and subsequent influences on the person likewise differ with Mascarello (Komarovski 2010: 10 in Mascarello 2015:79) recognizing such as associated with the "vague but vogue" debate around mystical experience(s):

"Komarovski shows both a mastery of the Tibetan literature and ingenuity in going beyond the Western interpretative models and basic assumptions regarding mystical experiences, borrowing from a distinct approach used by Tibetan thinkers. According to this different framework, the author suggests to shift the focus of analysis from mystical experiences *per se* to the conditioning processes leading to them, as well as and from the descriptive dimension to the practical one. This crucial refocusing discloses unexpected similarities between different traditions as well as making generalizations about mysticism more problematic."

We therefore have, with Forman, an understanding of the PCE and the development of the DMS as a common or essential element across religions as mysticism. And though others do not agree, this does not eliminate the theoretical relevance of Forman's confessional request. This is because mysticism may still be seen as providing the basis for a new kind of unifying faith for those leaning toward a global culture; an emergent spirituality for a holistically minded person that may replace commitment to traditional religions. Katz and companions' critique of the above and their exploration of the relation to mysticism in detailed works referencing the actual data of mysticism.

List 4.3.1.1 The Essentialist hypothesis of mystics as countered by the Constructivists

- 4.3.1.1.1 Where it is said that mystics are an elite transcending religion and doctrine, Katz and company show that they are examples supporting traditions and operationalising doctrines.
- 4.3.1.1.2 Where it is said that mystics cannot speak about the Transcendent meaningfully, Katz and company show that mystics speak volumes and thereby help introduce people to an experience of the Transcendent.
- 4.3.1.1.3 Where it is said that mystics are loaners, individuals and revolutionaries on the periphery of society and faith, Katz and company show that they are leaders, guides and models at the inner circle of their respective religions.

Yet, though they work so hard at understanding what mysticism ‘is’, they are accused of not including their own personal experience and critique as “studying mysticism second-hand” (Forman 1999:19). And this is perhaps true, and contextually understandable within Modernity which requires a strict division between what is objective and what is subjective.

Forman’s position, as ‘first-hand’, is confessional and relies on personal mystical experience. It is Buddhocentric as descending from Buddhism in thinking and practice. And in light thereof, Forman puts forward a distinction between trophotropic and ergotropic states and asks that we reserve mysticism for the former kind of experience along with the practice of meditation. Here the Personal Consciousness Event and associated introspective practices and trophotropic states and experiences provide a challenge to the Constructivists unargued assumption that there are no unmediated experience(s) (Forman 1999:1-6; Katz 1983:4). However, this also perhaps results in the unargued assumption that extroversive practices and experiences and theism associated therewith are entirely constructed. As such, there is, according to the Essentialist, no *Self-revelation* (*Śekîṇā*) takes place.

The key to reconciling their perspective lies not in defining mysticism as one thing or another but in developing a model of mystical experience incorporating both the mystical experience of the introspective mystics exploring the inner natural of themselves and the cosmos and those whose mysticism is tied to the self-revelation of a personal, volitional, self-revealing Person. We must account not only for the variety of mysticism but also the variety of mysticism(s) within each religion. Here, again, we recognise the arrival at an ‘if’ in related to religion as sociological construction and spirituality as the individual in first-person present-continuous. We have not yet, then arrived at an ‘if’ with regards to mysticism. Instead, Buddhocentric contributors draw everything into *Śūnyatā* as variously expressed and Christocentric contributors into *Christ* as variously expressed. The intent is not here to focus on or critique the Essentialist position. Instead, its to understand that there is a solid logic to it that enables the Buddhocentric and post-metaphysical to agree on an ‘if’. (But as that ‘if’ is partial, meaning that it does not include the personal transcendent, that it remains an ‘if not’.) Let’s consider the logic of the Essentialists in arguing for an essential experience.

List 4.3.1.2 Essential experience

- 4.3.1.2.1 There is a link between *Śūnyatā* as the experience and *Samādhi* as a state of being therein and thereafter. Here the individual experiences of *Śūnyatā* are eventually transformative of the individual’s consciousness toward intermittent states of and the eventual state of *Samādhi*. Both *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* are beneficial with the former temporary and the latter enduring. *Samādhi* is the state of being consciously present in daily life while consciously aware of *Śūnyatā* (Forman 1999:27). No one holds that it is *Śūnyatā* that alone transforms an individual, but instead that the attainment of *Samādhi* is supported by living in same world(view) in a new way. This “new way” is a life of regular meditative practice which leads to *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi*. The path itself

is a long and complex meditative, conceptual, therapeutic, devotional, and existential path and the goal is a permanent life change. Both *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* events are markers along the life path (Forman 1999:28). There is thus a relationship between meditation practices, the experience of *Śūnyatā*, the state of not being in *Samādhi* and the state of *Samādhi*.

- 4.3.1.2.2 The relationship between consciousness, unconsciousness, and conscious unconsciousness is complicated to understand and explain. We may think of our ordinary daily and waking state as that of consciousness, our ordinary sleeping state as that of unconsciousness, and the meditative state as the state of conscious unconsciousness. The state of conscious unconsciousness is one in which the consciousness persists without the mind and senses (Forman 1999:29). And being without the mind and senses, it is not linguistically mediated. As such, it is “consciousness aware of itself, experience such awareness of recognition, and must be analysed on its own terms” (Forman 1999:171). This is a mystical experience and does not arise from the senses and is not about the senses (Forman 1999:170). It is a Pure Consciousness Event, with the consciousness encountering itself (Forman 1999:171) not through the medium of language or culture or the senses but at a more foundational and fundamental level before those activities are operative.
- 4.3.1.2.3 Where the Constructivists hold that there is a relationship between mystical concepts and their references, Forman argues that the references seemingly point toward supporting different theological constructs but in fact can be shown to depart from the same essential experience. Forman builds on the notion that two individuals may radically differ in interpretation and explanation of the same experience. Hence Jean-Paul Sartre, Bernadette Roberts, Hui Neng, Meister Eckhart and Forman himself all share the same experience and express such variously (Forman 1999:157) (and by implication that others, like Komarovski and Mascarello will offer their own versions thereof). We can show that they share the same experience when referring, for example, to Sartre’s notion of “nonpositional consciousness” and Hui Neng’s wu-nien which mutually elucidate each other. The same experience is therefore spoken of as non-intentionally conscious and nonpositional consciousness and *Śūnyatā*, as “empty of content”, and *prajñā*, “aware of itself reflexively”. All share similar characteristics of silence and self-awareness.
- 4.3.1.2.4 The Zen Abbot Daido Sensei Looi points out that there is an *absolute Samādhi* as well as a *working samādhi* (Forman 1999:21). In *absolute Samādhi* the individual is not conscious, experiences a loss of time, and returns to consciousness with the knowledge/understanding that they have not been sleeping (Forman 1999:23). In

working samādhi the individual is aware and responsive (Forman 1999:24). There is thus a dual state, of being consciously unconscious while intentionally active that is the essence of the Dualistic Mystical State. There is a state where the unchanging interior silence is reflexively aware of itself. Through practice this awareness can be carried over into daily living. The Dualistic Mystical State is the state wherein the unchanging interior silence is maintained concurrently with intentional experience in a long-term and permanent way (Forman 1999:151). We thus find the Essentialists identifying a common non-theistic experience as central to all religion(s) and mysticism(s).

- 4.3.1.2.5 Rose identifies like introspective practices and “concentration itineraries” associated with the core mystical experience of *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* in the Buddhist *Jhānas*, the Yogic *Samādhi*, and the Catholic *Unio Mystica* (union with God). This is celebrated as a “recovery of mysticism in the age of the constructivists” (Rose 2016). Rose assumes a minimalist *sutta jhāna* (Rose 2016: loc.1697/8498) as meditation without rigorous asceticism; distinguishes meditative yoga (*rāja yoga*), specifically *Samādhi*, from the physical and export yoga as exercises for the body (Rose 2016: loc.2277/8498). Here yoga is “meditation based and enlightenment oriented” (Rose 2016: loc.2312/8498); and “practical Catholic mystical theology” (Rose 2016: loc.3598/8498) and “reawakening of interest among Christians in ‘*lectio divina*’, contemplative prayer, and Christian meditation in and outside of the Catholic Church” (Rose 2016: loc.3616/8498) as pointing to a “spiritual experience shared by mystical traditions” (loc.3636/8498). We thus find that the Essentialists identify common introspective practices connecting mystics across religions to the same fundamental experience and state of conscious unconsciousness.

Forman’s request presents a significant and interesting challenge to the Christian faith not only as religion, and therewith social construction, and spirituality, and therefore commonality in contemplative practices, but in terms of mysticism, and therefore to whether or not there is one or two essential experiences. Essentialism therefore understands that the concept of revelation is a linguistic translation of *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* into various reports by mystics within their respective world(view)s. There is thus a disconnect between the experience of *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* and the religions as so incredibly diverse.

And though we may offer *Diagram 4.3.1 Essential experience* below as mapping the different faiths’ relationship to the same core or essential experience as *Śūnyatā*, how exactly this is arrived at through shared introspective practices requires some explanation.

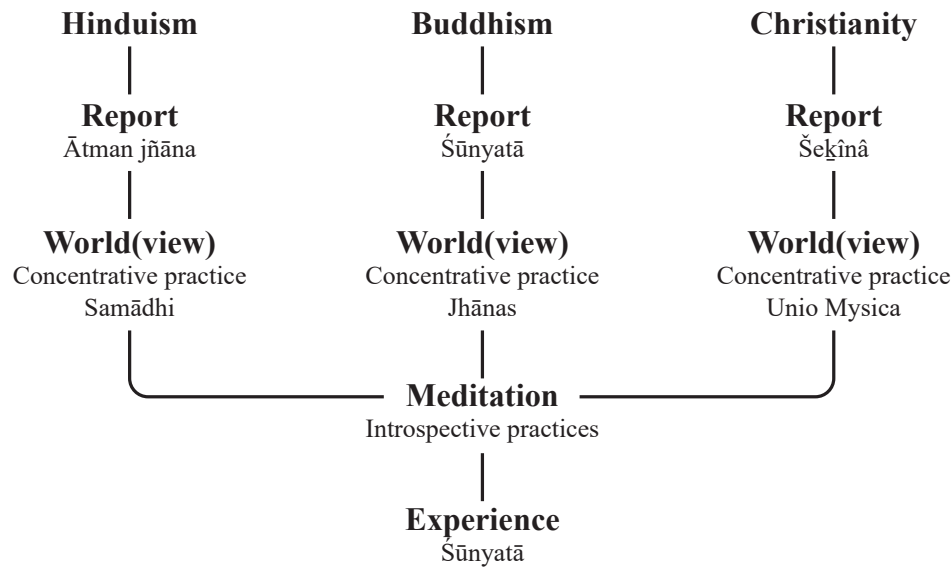


Diagram 4.3.1 Essential experience

In the diagram above we illustrate that the underlying experience of *Śūnyatā* is tied to the introspective essential practices of meditation as found in different world(view)s. The focal object is perhaps found to be various expressions of the same underlying reality.

4.3.2 ESSENTIAL PRACTICE

The Essentialism of Forman and Rose is conceptually complex, with Rose in particular reconciling Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity around the developmental stages of the practitioner of meditation. Though Shear notes that meditation is practiced variously with different goals (reference), Essentialism reconciles them around the meditative landmarks in Hindu, Buddhist and Christian thinking. Rose's conceptual and linguistic mastery is phenomenal, and little justice can be done to it here. Nevertheless, attempt to do so we must.

As noted earlier the common introspective practices, though diverse, are put forward. And therewith, a common experience is highlighted as that of *Śūnyatā*. These are both designed to counter the rebuttal to early essentialism by the Constructivists. Here one could not easily argue that Forman and Rose do not ground their Essentialism in a concrete reading of mysticism as diverse expressions understood as reconciled in meditation and the development of the mystical consciousness of the practitioner. The Essentialists focus on the essential practices and make use of mystical texts to support their focus on a specific kind of mystical experience. The Essentialist relies on theistic mystical texts to find a conjunction between their experience of *Śūnyatā* and Christian mystics silence and absence

of God and their commensurate dark nights. (The Essentialists, however, do not explore neither the experience of God within the Christian stream as texts or as presently available mystical experience.)

Rose picks up on Forman's confessional request and impetus and finds just the required contemplative universal across mystical practice in the "concentration itineraries" of the Buddhist *Jhānas*, the *Samādhi*²³, and the Catholic *Unio Mystica*. We may take this to mean that, for the Essentialist, that the Hindu experience of *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*) as in Advaita Vedanta as expressed by Adi Shankara (188-820 CE) is that the self is *Ātman-Brahman*, the Buddhist experience of *Enlightenment* (*bodhi*) in relation to *Emptiness* (*Śūnyatā*) as expressed by Masao Abe, and the Judeo-Christian experience of God's self-revelation in relation to God's activities in Person (the *manifest presence of God* (*Šekîna*) as expressed in Scripture and by numerous Christian mystics including those available today to somehow be the same. This is celebrated as a recovery of mysticism "in the reign of the constructivists" (2016). Here Forman notes that the same experience can be expressed in various ways (Forman 1999:47-48), relying on common contemplative practices. This fits the assumptions and requirements of modernist science where the requirement of replicability and the like attainment of the Personal Consciousness Experience and Dualistic Mystical State can be supplied by introspective mysticism but not by ergotrophic mysticisms and relies on the latter being excluded in favour of introspective mysticism within the orbit of ergotrophic mysticisms such as Christianity. Clearly this supports the essentialist assertion that the same experience can be expressed in different ways (Forman 1994:47-48) and clearly these three experiences are viewed as essentially the same experience albeit expressed variously across three mystical traditions. Again, there is a further synergy here in the work of Komjathy (cf. 2018)²⁴ and the proposal of *contemplative studies* as a new field related to the study of religion, spirituality and mysticism.

The quest of the Essentialists for what mysticism 'is' continues healthily in the dialectic tension between Essentialists and Constructivists. The conversation concerning Mysticism/mysticism is furthered toward delimiting mysticism. A convincing argument is thus developed by Essentialists where mystics across religions are shown to share the same introspective practices which in turn lead to a perennial experience that is expressed variously as Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. Considering this, what can be made of the Constructivist's quest?

Given that proponents of the Essentialist position are, however, Buddhocentric or Buddhist-descended thinkers, their work is perhaps also confessional. Perhaps not confessional in a dogmatic sense of trying to tell others what to believe but perhaps confessionally inviting others to what they have found. There is, after all, the weight of a paradigm of thinking behind Essentialism.

Rose therefore agrees with Forman that Hindu, Buddhist and Christian arrive at the same core experience of *Śūnyatā* through Meditation or introspective practices. We may model this in *Diagram*

23 To distinguish Forman's usage of *Samādhi* from Rose's we shall retain Forman's in relation to *absolute Samādhi* and *working samādhi*.

24 This is not to say that Komjathy is an essentialist as that would be unfair and inaccurate. Instead it is to recognise that Essentialists may well draw on Contemplative Studies in support of Essentialism even as they draw on Neuroscience.

4.3.1 *Essential experience* above and explore the contemplative universals as tied to the development of the consciousness of the individual in Diagram 4.3.2.2 Correlated meditation landmarks adapted from Rose (2016: loc.1974, 3822, and 4253/8498 below).

A complete discussion of Rose's Contemplative universals in Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity lies beyond the focus and scope of this dissertation. We do, however, offer *Diagram 3.1.3.2.2 Correlated meditation landmarks* below.

A brief discussion of these correlated contemplative universals follows below by way of understanding the complexity of making such a claim in a pluralistic environment.

List 4.3.2.2 Correlated meditation landmarks

- 4.3.2.2.1. The proposal that the Christian mystical experience is in fact of *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* and that such is reported as the *Unio Mystica* (*relational union with God*) in Christianity without there being any *Self-revelation* (*Śekṇā*) involved as the activity a transcendent Person. This means that, according to the Essentialist, that the Christian Scriptures considered as a faithful witness to a personal God are in fact a conditionally misconstrued report of *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi*. Hence a solipsistic loop between the religion of Christianity and the Scriptures must continue in such a manner that virtually all Christians do not experience *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi*. And those that do, such as Dionysius and Meister Eckhart, have masterfully woven *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* into Christianity as the *Unio Mystica* (*relational union with God*) rather than God's relational *Self-revelation* (*Śekṇā*). It is, however, hard to consider *Śekṇā* as synonymous with *Śūnyatā*. If the key mystical experience of Christianity is of *Christ* drawing near in Person to speak and act, that differs significantly from *Śūnyatā* as arduously arrived through long practice and training. And this experience of *Śekṇā* differs to that of *Unio Mystica* as elaborated by Rose.

| Contemplative universals | Christian mysticism | Meditative landmarks in Catholic mystical theology |
|---|---|--|
| Convergence Mind focuses on the meditation object | The purgative way Disciplines, practices and habits | Active recollection Mind focuses on the meditation object |
| Coalescence Mind fixes on or locks on the meditation object | | Ligature of the faculties Mind focuses on the meditation object |
| Simplification Mind simplifies itself factor by factor | The illuminative way Dark night Union and disunion | Mystical union Mind focuses on the meditation object |
| Quiescence Mind is stilled | | Suspension of the faculties Mind focuses on the meditation object |
| Beatitude Mind is transcended | The unitive way Dark night Transforming union | Transforming union Transforming union (before death) Beautific vision (after death) |
| (Rose 2016: loc.1974/8498) | (Rose 2016: loc.3822/8498) | (Rose 2016: loc.4253/8498) |

Diagram 4.3.2.2 Correlated meditation landmarks

- 4.3.2.2.2. The proposal that the Hindu mystical experience²⁵ is in fact of *Śūnyatā* and *Samādhi* and not of *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*) as in Advaita Vedanta as expressed by Adi Shankara (788-820 CE). Note that this is not the experience-less Brahmanism as critiqued in the *Tevijja Sutta*, but a re-assertion of Brahmanism through the framework of Advaita Vedanta. It is equally hard to consider *Ātman jñāna* as synonymous with *Śūnyatā*. For *Ātman jñāna* is the realization that one is not the temporal self but in fact the internal or deeper self is the eternal, transcendent and enduring *Ātman-Brahman* dressed up in our humanity as embodied. We are the eternal Self experiencing an earthly life as our historical self. How can the fundamental truth be *Śūnyatā* when it is *Ātman-Brahman*?
- 4.3.2.2.3. Essentialism therefore relies not only on what Christianity puts forward as *Šekîṇâ* or Hinduism as *Ātman-Brahman* but on the contemplative practices and introversive experiences. Here these practices become a divide or multiply by zero across the diversity of religions. Essentialism draws on the availability of mystical reports of texts to identify like reports of conscious unconsciousness and *Śūnyatā* and on that basis rejects the rest in Christianity and Hinduism related as respectively *Self-revelation* (*Šekîṇâ*) and *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*).

The analysis above is, perhaps, not fair. Anyone familiar with Rose's work will know that the Essentialism does not take place in relation to the religion and its doctrines. (These doctrines are all jettisoned.) Essentialism looks to the individual and their relation to the object of the respective

²⁵ This concept may be further developed and only a cursory understanding is put in play by the researcher here.

faith as a real relationship with an idea provided by a religion in a world(view). And in terms of this there are milestones in the contemplative universals. Hence, to the lack of *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*) in Hinduism and the lack of *Śekīnā* as tied to the *Unio Mystica* (*relational union with God* in relation to Christianity is not a concern that needs to be picked up in Essentialism. Here Rose (2016: loc.3771/8498) notes:

One does not have to be a “religious particularist and mystical constructivist” (Rose 2016:3653/8498) to ask questions such as those above. Instead, one only has to offer a mystical experience in keeping with the broadest of Christian revelation theology to do so. “From a contemporary neurobiological perspective, Poulain’s felt sense of grace in the arising of mystical states can be attributed to bottom-up processing of the basal ganglia while the volitional attempts to remaster recollection can be attributed to the top-down processing of the left prefrontal cortex...”

Here there must then be a particularist and constructivist overlay that determines that Christians interpret the mystical experience as supportive of *Unio Mystica* (*union with God*) and Hindus as *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*). The commonality then lies in the neurobiological foundations of the individual and the introspective practices themselves. And mysticism therefore transcends the “prevailing cultural, intellectual, social, and theological norms and influences, whatever they happen to be” (Katz in Katz *et al.* 2000:7). As such, Christians articulate *Śūnyatā* as *Unio Mystica* (*union with God*) and Hindus as *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*). The constructivists are then correct in asserting that “meditation literature” is the foundation of all things mystical across the religious diversity of humanity (Gimello in Katz *et al.* 1978: 171). Rose (2016: loc.4440/8498) shares his intent:

I hope to move toward establishing the reality of religious experience and its power to ground a philosophy of religions capable of providing a foundation of the religious life and, more fundamentally, for a meditatively grounded metaphysics.

The “religious experience” that Rose seeks to ground Essentialism in may be represented as per *Diagram 4.3.2.3 The believer in religious context* below:

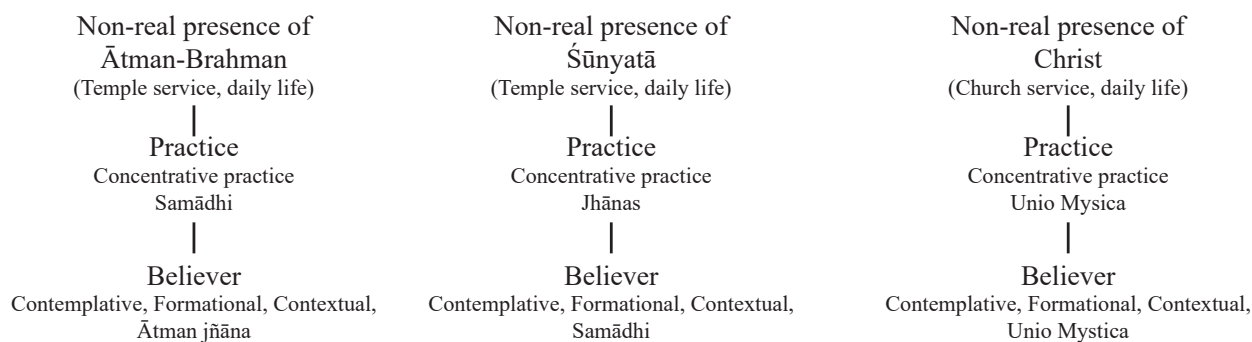


Diagram 4.3.2.3 The believer in religious context

Here the Essentialist request functions analogously as a divide by zero or multiply by zero ($X \div 0 = 0$; $X \times 0 = 0$). From the basis of Christian mystical theology, especially as going back to Meister Eckhart (Forman) and Augustin-François Poulain (Rose 2016: loc.3599/8498), the role of *apophatic theology* as the 'via negativa' or 'way of negation' appears to support *Śūnyatā* or *Emptiness* in a manner that effectively denies Christian *cataphatic theology* or 'via positiva' or 'way of affirmation'. But, more importantly, it completely excludes even the possibility of *Self-revelation* (*Śekîṇā*) and *Self-realization* (*Ātman jñāna*) or the necessity to explore each. The Essentialist request represents the secular age's impetus trajectory as moving away from society as governed by religious institutions and science and philosophy as determined by metaphysics and from our beliefs being determined by religion. But there is perhaps too much of a "let's throw everything away" when speaking of the relational presence of God.

4.4 THE MODERN QUESTS FOR WHAT MYSTICISM 'IS'

The initial explorations of mysticism by the likes of James, Underhill, Otto and Huxley, among others, resulted in mysticism as an abstraction. Here the notion of religious experience as '*sui generis*', as self-explanatory and existing on its own rights independent of human reason and experience. And for a while 'religious experience' ends up being impossible to express and explain to anyone who does not share the self-explaining experience thereof. Thus, you knew because you know and could not know if you did not know. Their explorations were, however, poorly and improperly grounded in the actual data of mystic experience(s) and mystical reports (Forman 1999:31-32). Essentialism finds the commonality of *Emptiness* in Christian mystical theology and a corresponding development of the mystics' consciousness. Here the symbols of religion are helpful to the respective mystics within their world(view), but their world(view) is essentially "empty" and therefore, the world(view) matters not. Instead, the essential practice and experience is key and somehow ends up expressed in and through the language and symbols of Christian Scriptures and mystical theology.

That Essentialism only works with Christian mystical texts, finds what is shared or in common as essential and discards the Christian mystical experience. The Essentialist request, as exemplified by Forman and supported by Rose, is a modern expression representative of modern concerns. Yet it is one that Christianity, as rationalism, has no response to. This is because of the dysfunctional relationship between faith and experience within the Christian world(view). (We shall explore this later.) Forman requests that we delimit “mysticism” to introversive experience and contemplative practices alone (Forman 1994:4-6). The Essentialists understand there to be an essential foundation, one that’s experiential, upon which all mysticism and religion is established. Yet though the Constructivists hold open the potential for multiple experiential foundations and mysticism, Christianity is, generally speaking, unable to provide anything to counter.

Presently the Essentialists are putting forward a good case and should we accept their assertions and requests then we end up accepting the *Śūnyatā* of Eastern and Western thinking but not the *Ātman-Brahman* of Hinduism or the *Christ* of Christianity. We can agree with the Essentialists on the common practices and the common spirituality of people across world(view)s without having to also make the religions and the mysticisms fit into the same box. The horizon is, after, incredibly wide and much depends on the direction you are facing and then head toward.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Though early essentialism, Constructivism and Essentialism make great strides toward helping us understand what mysticism ‘is’ there is a difference between mysticism as a essential and abstracted concept and in the plural as diverse, nuance and complex. The modern quest for what mysticism ‘is’ shifts in view from the religions and their doctrines to the shared experience and practice of people and, more recently, to the similarities in the development of the consciousness of the individual.

These conversations are ‘God after God’ conversations that take place within the modern era, where the-death-of God enables us to focus on religions as conditionally constructed within a world(view) and as having a history. And within this era we are developing tools and methodologies enabling the exploration of shared practices and individual psychological developments across the world’s faiths and their histories. We can recognise that Essentialism does well to identify and explain the essential practices and experiences within the religions while recognizing that it does not well understand or explain theistic objections such a narrow box for what mysticism ‘is’.

The 'God after God' conversations taking place in relation to mysticism support the objective non-realism of God as coupled to the psychological realism for Hindus and Christians. Again, there is no exploration of the objective realism of God. Instead the common ground of objective non-realism is taken not as a bridge toward objective realism but as a divide or multiply by zero, resulting in objective non-realism coupled with the contemplative universals.

Modern Christianity

The various ‘God after God’ conversations in philosophy and the quest for what mysticism ‘is’ are perhaps driven more by God’s absence within Christianity and a backlash to faith without experience/evidence and offer post-theistic trajectories that we can follow. Yet the absence of God, in the sense of *Self-revelation* (*Šekînâ*) may be hard to understand in a religion ostensibly all about knowing God. It is also particularly problem if God-absence is fundamentally problematic.

Considering the arrival of philosophy at non-realism and the conditionalism of world(view)s, and the Essentialism argument for correlated mediation landmarks and recognition of essential experience and practices, what does Christianity make of the experience of God, the absence of God and God-absence? Here we explore Christianity after Christendom, mode the Christian world(view), and gain an understanding of Christian rationalism as succeeding Christian metaphysics. Christian thinking revolves around the church and God’s special revelation. As noted by Erickson (1985:153):

“Because man is finite and God is infinite, if man is to know God it must come about by God’s revelation of himself to man. By this we mean God’s manifestation of himself to man in such a way that man can know and fellowship with him.”

Erickson well summarises the need for God as transcendent, and therefore never reachable, to reveal Godself to creatures. The customary understanding is that God’s general revelation has been made available to “all persons at all times and in all places” and that this differs from Gods’ special revelation. In the latter, God has provided “particular communications and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations which are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings” (Erickson 1985:153-154).

5.1 CHRISTIANITY AFTER CHRISTENDOM

We are challenged when speaking about Christianity as it is broad, nuanced, complex and somewhat attached to the consecutive geographic world(view)s. Yet here we speak about Christianity as a world(view) developed over consecutive world(view)s from the very beginnings in *Christ* and the ‘*ekklesia*’ as founded ahead of and thereafter within the institutional church, Monasticism,

Christendom, and the institutional church continuing as Catholicism and Protestantism within the secular age and modern era.

The Christian world(view) may be rooted to the historical *Christ* as Incarnation and his ongoing work as Risen Lord and the ‘*ekklesia*’ as an historical people, but it transitions from a sub-culture within the Graeco-Roman world(view) relying on *Self-revelation* (*Šekîná*). It develops into the Christian world(view) we have today beginning from its adoption as the official faith of the Roman Empire and establishment as the formal and institutional expression church.

5.1.1 MODELLING THE CHRISTIAN WORLD(VIEW)

The complex relationship and intertwining of Roman Empire and Christian faith plays out in history as modelled below in *Diagram 5.1.1 The Christian world(view)* below. Here the sacral, secular and post-secular ages provide hermeneutic contextuality for the 'God after God' conversations with a recognition of internal developments within the institutional expression of Christianity and the underlying changes of the world(view) in relation to the Roman Empire and historical periods or ages. This model allows for flexibility in terms of overlaps and consecutive developments.

List 5.1.1 Consecutive Christian world(view)s

- 5.1.1.1 **The Patristic era.** The patristic era follows *Christ*, the apostles and the early ‘*ekklesia*’ to overlap with the formal adoption of Christianity across the Roman Empire into the Monastic era. During this period Christianity is a spreading religion unregulated by the Empire and not governed by a formal institution. The patristic era of Christianity here is understood as the momentum of the early church. So, speaking generally and imprecisely, there is a period following the death of the apostles and the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire. Here we recognise that Christianity becomes dependent-yet-independent and there is a transition from the early church within the empire toward the institutional expression of the Church thereafter as official public religion of the Roman Empire.
- 5.1.1.2 **The Monastic era.** The monastic era is one that follows from the early desert fathers and mothers. Monasticism was integral to the continuation of the early church within the institutional Church. Gregory the Great (540-604) officially instituted Monasticism with Benedict of Nursia (480-550) providing the guidelines regulating the life of monks living communally under an abbot. The church was able to survive the fall of the Empire due to its earlier dependent-yet-independent construction. Here Monasticism serves as the institutional framework of the western Church till the institution of the Church within Christendom. During this period, Monasticism served as places of knowledge, learning, and culture.

- 5.1.1.3 **The era of Christendom.** A later Christendom as the Holy Roman Empire with its Holy Roman Church emerges to consist of the now-Christian people in a particular geopolitical construct. Where Christianity had earlier insisted on independent-dependence it now becomes synonymous therewith. The close association between the governance of society and faith remains till at least the 1500s, though perhaps continuing till the modern era in the 1800s and even today in various forms. During the later Medieval Era, as in Christendom, the monastics continue contributing to society through the developments of the New Mysticism and call for the reformation of the church. Retrospectively where the partnership between Church and Empire first enabled the faith it here defines the faith. And as with the institution of the church, the monastic institutions also find themselves in need of reform resulting. Their reform leads to new expressions of Christian mysticism as the new mysticism that is also somewhat post-monastic as middle-way between vocation as monk and secular vocations. Here there is a relationship between the institutional church and monasticism as hosted therein and representative thereof.
- 5.1.1.4 **The Formal Church era.** The later transition from Christendom as the sacral age to the secular produces the present era of the church that is paradigmatically centred on and defined by the institutional church. Around the 1500s various changes in society, and calls for reform of the church, result in the religious institutions and affairs shifting from the main stage of daily life into increasingly privatised beliefs and familial life. This is first with the church continuing as institution under the patronage of the modern state, as in the various orthodox churches, by way of example the Catholic (such as the Orthodox churches such as Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox) and Protestant (such as the English Orthodox or Anglican or German Orthodox or Lutheran). Subsequently the Protestants have, like the Orthodox, multiplied beyond their original national and geographic constraints. Here we also find recent expressions of the church as officiated for-profit and not-for-profit business as recognised by the state/nation. However, Catholic and Protestant share in common the institution of the church as well as the '*ekklesia*'.

When exploring *Diagram 5.1.1 The Christian world(view)* below we can see how they can be read as though Christianity is synonymous with the institutional church. Christians first emerged as a vital people (*ekklesia*) and then came to be defined by the institutional church under the patronage of the Roman Empire. And thereafter Christianity comes to be synonymous with the church through

complex historical developments. The result is that the Person and work of the Spirit as the relational presence of God (*Šekîna*) considered vital by the early church and Christian mystics as monastics, is eclipsed by the church as institution and the institution of monasticism and this remains the case today. Where the experience of the Holy Spirit as an active Person (*Šekîna*) was vital to Christianity in the Patristic Era this is eclipsed by Christendom and therewith and thereafter the institution of the church.

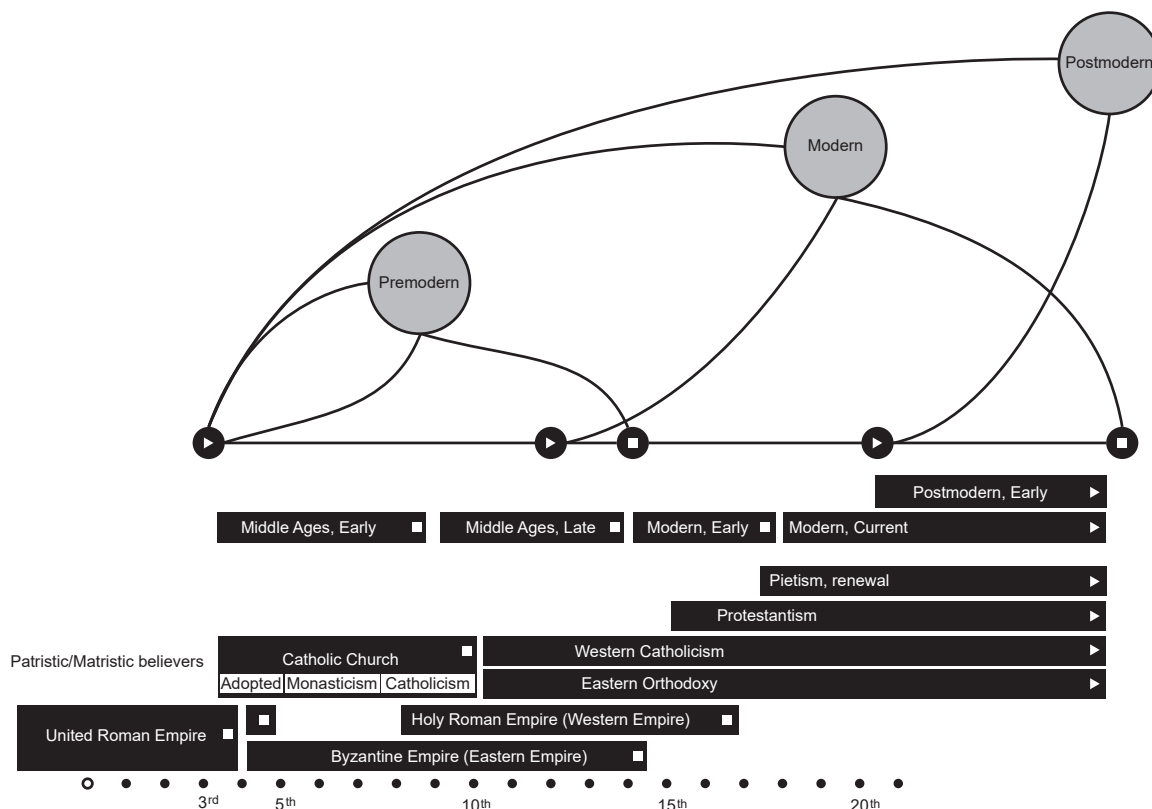


Diagram 5.1.1 The Christian world(view)

When reviewing Christianity through the lens of God's silence and absence in the 'God after God' conversations we must bear in mind the experience of God (*Šekîna*) is not considered essential and where faith 'sans' or without experience, or faith in God without and independent of corresponding experience, is established and promoted as mature and true faith. This, however, merits further attention and exploration.

5.1.2 CHRISTIANITY AS SACRAL WORLD(VIEW)S

What Christianity is as Catholicism and Protestantism may be considered as much the descendants of Christendom as the early church. The secular age succeeds Christendom with the monarchies and the institutional churches of the various Roman Empires continuing within an increasingly modern and

secular world(view). Where Catholicism and Protestantism continue after Christendom it is as they arise in relation to and in the context of the secular age. As such, they are modern ventures where the State and the Church continue playing the whose on top game only now with the State in charge.

Here the sacral world(view) is Christian- Aristotelian and comes to be replaced by rationalism within the secular age. Cupitt (1998:30) notes that objective rationalism and absolute monarchy were combined into a tight system of hierarchy as a world(view) that can be seen to be expressed in the Christian-Aristotelian cosmology. The result being a clear chain of command: God, Christ, the Pope, the King, the church, and the State authorities – all with no room for criticism or innovation. Instead, its a matter of absolute truth and absolute power and absolute value wherein the individual submits and accepts one's place in the all-powerful, all-knowing system.

The close association between the Roman Empire and Christianity results in the institutional church defending the science and politics of the Empire during the Copernican Revolution and Protestant Reformation. We explore this in *List 5.1.2 Contributions toward the modern Christian world(view)* below.

List 5.1.2 Contributions toward the modern Christian world(view)

5.1.2.1 **Geocentrism wins out over Heliocentrism.** The Copernican Revolution displaced the cosmology that lasted over 1,500 years which innovated on an earlier cosmology wherein the work of Aniximander (6th century BCE) had already shown the world to be round. Back then the geocentrism is defended by Plato (c.428 - c.3347 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) against the Heliocentrism of Aristarchus of Samos (310-230 BCE). Heliocentrism is then rejected again by Hipparchus of Nicea (190 BCE - 120 BCE) and geocentricism completed by Claudius Ptolemy (100-170 CE).²⁶ The later Christian-Aristotelian geocentricism is, then, the world(view) of the Romans which adopts Christianity as the religion of the Empire.

5.1.2.2 **Christianity is adopted by the Roman Empire.** Christianity went from a persecuted faith and people within the Roman Empire to a tolerated faith jointly issued by Galerius (250-311 CE), Constantine I (272-337 CE) and Licinius (c. 263-325) as the Edict of Tolerance (311 CE), followed up by the latter two in the Edict of Milan (313 CE) respectively for the Western and Eastern Empire, and then adopted as the faith of the Empire at the Edict of Thessalonica (380 CE). In a short space of time, Christianity when from tolerated to legal to adopted then from a tolerated faith to adoption as the religion of the Empire only to become synonymous with the Western Empire as the later Christendom of Charlemagne (742-814 CE), reigniting both Empire and Church. Christianity was adopted by the Empire and, in turn, imbibed its world(view), embraced its hierarchy and taught its science. This was later developed into the

²⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aristarchus-of-Samos>; https://www.ancient.eu/Aristarchus_of_Samos/; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristarchus_of_Samos

Christian-Aristotelian cosmology as expressed by Dante Alighieri (1262-1321) in *The Divine Comedy* (1320). The Roman Empire had adopted Christianity as its religion and geocentric model as its Science and Christianity, in turn, adopted both and supported it through scant biblical references. There was a *quid pro quo* within Christendom wherein the science of the Empire supported its politics and religion and they, in turn, supported the Empire.

5.1.2.3 **Christendom succeeds the Roman Empire.** The Western Empire fell to the Visigoths (around 480 CE) and was later recaptured by the Eastern Empire. During this period Christianity's earlier independence enabled it to succeed the Roman Empire and play a significant role in society and its success resulted in it coming to be considered synonymous with the recaptured and re-established Empire as Christendom (c. 800 CE onwards).

5.1.2.4 **The church continues as Catholicism and Protestantism.** The church remains unified in the Eastern and Western Empire until The Great Schism (1054) where it continues as Western Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, while the Eastern Empire is sacked by Crusaders (1204) somewhat ending rather than rescuing the Eastern Empire and severely impacting any reconciliatory hope between the church in the East and the West. During this period, there is a tension between the church and mystics in Western Catholicism. This led to the church banning the laity from reading the Scriptures in the vernacular at *The church Council of Toulouse* in 1229 AD and at *The Council of Tarragona* of 1234. Though there are arguably mitigating circumstances for this, the '*devotio moderna*' was central to the development of an alternative Christianity to the church within Christendom and a middle way between taking celibate and monastic vows and vocation or maintaining a family and secular vocation.

5.1.2.5 **Several revolutions take place within Christendom in the 16th century.** A number of revolutions took place within Christendom which includes the Copernican Revolution bookended by Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543) publishing *De revolutionibus orbium celestial* (1543) and Isaac Newton (1543-1727) publishing *Philosophia Naturalis Principia Mathematicus* (1687) with the new era of observational physics spearheaded by Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) enabling the observation of Venus and therewith securing consensus within and beyond the scientific community regarding the planets as imperfect planetary objects rather than perfect spheres made of *aether*. The revolutionary nature of the Copernican Revolution is best explored against the earlier Christian-Ptolemaic cosmology as explored in the Christian-Aristotelian cosmology below. It is in this same period that the Protestant Reformation took place as championed by Martin Luther (1483-1546) in Wittenberg (1517) and John Calvin

(1509-1564) in Geneva (1541) with the Catholic-Protestant schism officiated between at the *Edict of Worms* (1521) as the rejection of Luther and the Reformation.

This short exploration of consecutive western world(view)s brings us to the secular age and Christianity in the modern world(view) as descending from consecutive world(view)s. Here Christianity, as world(view), also sees successive expressions of the institutional church leading toward a paradigm shared by Christianity as Catholicism and Protestantism.

5.1.3 THE SECULAR AGE

The secular age is an historical era. At the core lies the crowning of reason, with reason prevailing over superstitions, control and abuses of the sacral world(view)s and their religions. The modern expressions of the Christian faith shares the same historical and geographical spaces as the secular age and modern era. A thorough exploration of this lies beyond the scope of this work, but it is important that we distinguish between the modern era as epoch and modernity as an ethos.

List 5.1.3.1 Distinguish between The modern Era as *epoch* and Modernity as *ethos*:

- 5.1.3.1 **The modern Era.** Began with the 16th century and European Renaissance (14th to 18th Centuries) and the Age of Discovery (15th to 18th centuries) and includes significant revolutions from the 18th century including the French Revolution (1789-1799), the American Revolution (1765-1783) and the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840). This also includes the Great Divergence (19th century) where the New World overcame pre-modern constraints and where Western Civilization was broadly and competitively established. In turn, this laid the foundations for other cultural centres modernizing.
- 5.1.3.2 **Modernity.** Is a philosophical and intellectual outlook, which is a collection of paradigms built on the Enlightenment and tied to the sciences, the social sciences, and to the post-industrial secular urban life which challenges the respective premodern environments and reshapes them through modernization. As such, modernity is often adopted when environments modernise, resulting in tension between their respective pre-modernities and modernities.

As a faith, Christianity has during the modern era wrestled with itself in an effort to reform and redefine itself as modern faith rooted in a long-standing history as a people united in Christ across cultures and languages.

5.1.4 CHRISTIANITY WITHIN MODERNITY

Within the secular age there is often dichotomy between Reason and Experience. Reason focuses on the objective, the empirical; Experience on the subjective, the un-empirical. The result is that Reason is considered primary and reliable and enable us to leave behind our sacral and superstitious world(view)s. The result is a change from living in relation to what is established to what is reasonable, from accepting the way the world is to building the world anew. Reason is, however, often contrasted with Experience. And Experience is in turn linked to metaphysics, revelation and faith as distinguished from the empirical and veridical.

The Christian faith developed in relation to the Roman Empire and spans centuries of thinkers rooted in a world(view) and using the thinking tools of that world(view). In the transition from sacred to secular the faith gives up its reliance on metaphysics and instead comes to rely on Reason. The benefit thereof lies in establishing Christianity in the University. Here theology develops into new expression after scholasticism as academic fields. The second key benefit of transitioning from metaphysics to reason lies in enabling the institutional church to continue as dependent-yet-independent. This is both as the orthodox faith of people, such as the Russian Orthodox or English Orthodox, and denominations as Europe expands but also as not-for-profit businesses.

Yet within this secular the institutional church experiences no need for the relational presence of God (*Šekînâ*). Such ends up being related to Experience. And instead the Tradition and Word of God come to be aligned with Reason over Experience as objectively given.

5.1.5 THE CHURCH AS WORLD(VIEW)

To hold to a faith such as Christianity is to live within and interpret the world through a paradigm. And a paradigm is something that the members of a community share (Kuhn 1970:176), yet communities exist at various levels with sub-groups existing in relation to a broader or banner community (1970:178-179). Furthermore, both normal religion and revolutions are community-based activities. In order to understand them, one must unravel the changing community structure of the practitioners over time (Kuhn 1970:179).

Barbour (1960:215) reflections that Christianity is at once such a community built around the memory of the person of Christ where the church as loving community is the context of the Christian life and thought. The institution may of course become an end in itself, a static organization pursuing its own self-interest and bound so tightly to its past that it is unable to meet new challenges (Barbour 1966:216), but what the church 'is' has long been the very thing that divides the broader community into sub-communities.

We must recognise that there is a conjunction between the church as loving community, as the 'ekklesia' or people, and the church as institution, the church as structures and offices. We may divide broadly between the church as Orthodox and as Protestant. Doing so allows us to recognise that the church as Orthodox includes those sub-communities united in the memory of Christ and divided as Western Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy, and Independent Orthodoxies; the church as Protestant includes sub-communities divided from Western Catholicism as post-Catholic denominations, such as Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Calvinist, etc., and the rather large number and groupings of independent churches and movements. But it is perhaps most important to note that both Orthodox and Protestant are Christian on the basis of membership in a formal body sharing the memory of and identification with Jesus the historical man and risen Lord.

Barbour (1966:213) notes that knowledge has a social character, children learn language embodying concepts that affect the way they organise experience. There can be 'one-scientist as a field' nor 'one-devotee as a religions' and no 'lone-individual as society'. For it is the corporate life of a community that transmits a structure of ideals, standards, presuppositions, and patterns of behaviour. We all enter community through processes of acquiring distinctive attitudes and by becoming incorporated into the community (Barbour 1966:214). What Christianity 'is' may then be recognised as an ongoing sacral world(view) set within a broader secular world(view).

5.2 REVELATION

Erickson (1985:153) well summarises the need for God as transcendent, and therefore never reachable or findable, to reveal Godself to creatures (*Šekîna*). The customary understanding is that God's general revelation has been made available to "all persons at all times and in all places" and that this differs from Gods' special revelation. In the latter, God has provided "particular communications and manifestations of himself to particular persons at particular times, communications and manifestations which are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings" (Erickson 1985:153-154) which enables people to now "enter into redemptive relationship with him" (Erickson 1985: 175). Here "revelation" is understood as "revealing what is covered" in the sense that transcendence hides and obscures God who therefore makes Godself knowingly present (Erickson 1985:175) making general revelation inferior to special revelation though the latter builds on the former and each mutually require each other (Erickson 1985:177).

Here Erickson (1985:181) recognises the "modes or modalities" of special revelation as "historical events, divine speech, and the incarnation" and bundled into the Scriptures as the 'Word of God'.

List 5.2.1 The paradigm of special revelation includes

- 5.2.1.1 **Inspiration.** "The supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in

what they wrote actually being the Word of God.” (Erickson 1985:199). Catholics hold that this is the case for the Ecumenical Church Councils too. For Reems, “*inspiration* is the giving of revelatory information by whatever phenomenal means and *illumination* the giving of understanding to phenomenal revelation” (Reems 2015:6).

5.2.1.2 **Inerrancy.** “This is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all its teachings.” (Erickson 1985:221).

5.2.1.3 **Authority.** “The Bible, as the expression of God’s will to us, poses the right supremely to define what we are to believe and how we are to conduct ourselves” (Erickson 1985:241) as in the “right to command belief or action” as an “external authority” (Erickson 1985:242). This is, however, the case as Scripture for Protestants. Catholics understand the Tradition, and there with the Pope, to exercise this right. In particular, this is the “primacy of Peter and the See of Rome” (Ray 1999: loc.58/6757). Protestants hold that tradition has judicial authority and can “assist us to understand the Scripture and its application” but should never “displace Scripture” (Erickson 1985:258) and Catholics agree with this. However, where Protestants hold Scripture as primary Catholics hold Tradition as primary and therewith tied to Scripture. For Catholics, “history has a clear voice, but does not force itself upon us uninvited ... and waits to be discovered” (Ray 1999: loc.58/6757) and understands the “primitive Church” to have been “bequeathed to us by the apostles” (Ray 1999: loc.72/6757).

Revelation – whether Tradition or Scripture – is necessary because the Fall separated humanity from God. Humanity therefore needs special revelation in addition to general revelation due to the limitations of humanity (Erickson 1985:176). The “objective of special revelation was relational” with the “knowledge *about* God for the purpose of knowledge *of* God” and is also remedial (Erickson 1985:176). Here Erickson argues that “the direct presence of God, the most direct and complete form of special revelation, was lost” with the Fall and therefore special revelation is remedial in bringing us back to God (Erickson 1985:177).

Speaking in the broadest sense about revelation one would find it hard pressed to find a Protestant disagreeing with Erickson or Catholic with Ray. One would, however, find Catholic and Protestant disagreeing with each on which is primary, whether Tradition and Scripture or Scripture alone, but not on the sufficiency of revelation. For the Catholic, Tradition is sufficient and therewith Scripture; for the Protestant, Scripture. Reems (2015:3) notes that:

“The divide between Roman Catholic and Protestant understanding of Scripture as revelation lies in what place in the hierarchy of revelation each gives to scripture, to wit is

it first among equals (*prima scriptura*), a final judge over all its brothers (*sola scriptura*), or merely one of many brothers, as is the accepted view in Roman Catholicism.”

Speaking practically, special revelation is understood to be sufficient for a knowledge of God and therewith a saving relationship with God. This may be mediated by faith when receiving the Eucharist as Catholic and Word of God as Protestant, but these are understood to be the real presence of God.

Yet though the term ‘revelation’ is not present in early Christians creeds and is not found in the Scriptures it is nevertheless a long-standing paradigm within Christianity. The actual term 'revelation' begins to enter into writing in the period of the Enlightenment. It is then a recent and modern concept noted by Dulles (1992:xix) as arising in response to Deism. The Reformation and Copernican Revolution of the 16th century serve as the historical precursors to the Enlightenment of the 17th century. Here the secular age puts forward Reason as the successor to Metaphysics and together with Christianity crowns it king of science, politics, philosophy and theology.

Christianity, according to Dulles (1992:3), holds as given that:

“a permanently valid revelation concerning [Godself] in biblical times, a revelation that has deepened progressively through the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets, until it reached its unsurpassable climax in Jesus Christ. The Christian Church down through the centuries has been committed to this revelation and has sought to propagate it, defend it, and explain its implications.”

The idea of revelation is pervasive in the Bible and Christian theology, but it has been taken for granted and only recently come under scrutiny. Only in recent centuries has it been explored. First in the 16th century the Protestant and Orthodox both appealed to Revelation to support their positions against Deists. The result, according to Dulles (1992:4) is that:

"By the end of the nineteenth century the Christian churches were equipped with a systematically complete doctrine of revelation as a deposit of truth built up in biblical times and reliably transmitted through the Bible and church teaching. Among Christians who still adhere to this doctrine, revelation is seen as foundation to the religious life of the individual, to the mission of the church and to the method of theology."

The Christian individual holds to an attitude of faith in the sense of a believing response to the revealing word. The church sees itself as commissioned to safeguard and herald the revelation committed to it by Christ (Dulles 1992:4), addressing all humanity in the name of the revealing God. And theology can be contrasted with the philosophy of religion in being a disciplined reflection on faith and also of

revelation (Dulles 1992:5). Christian theologians agree on the centrality of revelation (Dulles 1992:5) despite contemporary difficulties against revelation (Dulles 1992:6-8) as protest against Christianity without revelation (Dulles 1992:8-14).

List 5.2.2 Revelation as problems

- 5.2.2.1 Traditional notions of revelation are considered mythical, as stories, which are based on primitive modes of thought that cannot be accepted by modern man (Dulles 2002: loc. 167/242).
- 5.2.2.2 Revelation (*Šekînâ*) is something people do not experience. They are told about revelation by the Bible and Church, but these are reports and not revelation (Dulles 2002: loc. 167/242).
- 5.2.2.3 Revelation imprisons one within a ghetto toward absolutism, cutting those who subscribe to the notion off from dialogue with science and philosophy. Viewed as such, revelation dehumanises others as the outsiders (Dulles 2002: loc. 167/242).

Dulles (1992:13) notes that the ‘notion of God is, for Jews and Christians, intertwined with the conviction that God is free and personal, that he acts on behalf of those whom he loves, and that his actions include, already within history, a partial disclosure of his nature, attributes, attitudes, and intentions. The acceptance of revelation is, therefore, of fundamental importance to the Christian faith.’

5.3 THE CHURCH

According to Dulles (2002: loc.167/242):

“In all Christian ecclesiologies, the church is intimately connected with divine revelation. If there were no revelation there could be no faith in the biblical and Christian sense, nor any worship, nor any church. If people accept the church at all, it is because they find in it a way of communion with God who freely emerges from his silence and discloses himself to me”

The church is the sole guaranteed provider of the Eucharist and the Message and the institution of the church is what Christ established and continues to build. The church, however, has a complicated history. The church is often viewed as “the collective dimension of the Christian life” (Erickson 1985: 1025). There is, however, much recognised confusion about what the church ‘is’. This is partly because the word is used to refer to “an architectural structure”, a “particular body of believers”, a “denomination or distinctive group” (Erickson 1985:1026). Erickson notes that “at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention which other doctrines

have received” with it being notes as recent as at “the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, Father Georges Florovsky claimed that the doctrine of the church had hardly passed its pretheological phase” (Erickson 1985: 1026, referencing Colin. W. Williams, *The church*, New Directions in Theology Today, vol.4 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) p.11.). Traditionally, the church was viewed as a divinely ordained institution as distinct from the world and as intended to transform it. This view, however, remains popular. The attention, however, lies mostly with the concrete expression of the institution of the church (Erickson 1985: 1028). Many believe that the “Church is (or ought to be) what it was at the beginning (or what it first became)” (Erickson 1985: 1029).

With regards to the nature of the church, Erickson says that “Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church” (Erickson 1985: 1033). The church is ‘the people of God’ (Erickson 1985: 1035), ‘the body of Christ’ (Erickson 1985: 1036), and ‘the temple of the Holy Spirit’ (Erickson 1985: 10389). To this we may add the church as “institution, communion, sacrament, herald and servant” (cf. Dulles 1974). Here the church is the realm of God or kingdom of God (Erickson 1985: 1041, referencing Ladd, *Jesus and the kingdom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp.259-60). The church is understood to have originated at Pentecost (Erickson 1985:1048).

In theory, then, the nature of the church is that is the people and not an institution such as a race or a geopolitical nation. However, the actual outworking in history is such that Catholics argue for the institutional church as established in Rome under the Pope as apostolic successor to Peter as the church. Speaking practically, whenever a Protestant speaks of a church it is concretely expressed as a Denomination or a not-for-profit business. Whenever an individual is converted to Christianity they are counted as a member of an institutional expression of the church and expected, more or less, to attend and participate in that institutional expression of the church. We may define the church as the ‘*ekklesia*’ but in practice it is the institution of the church that is paradigmatically central. Hence the focus is on attending the Mass, for Catholics, and Worship, for Protestants. To be out of the institutional church is viewed as a waning commitment to the faith and to God. The institutional church is therefore viewed as necessary for Christians.

Yet the notion of the church as a mystical body is present today and erodes the institutional view (Dulles 2002: loc. 171/242) and focuses on personal communion with God. This view also subordinates the proposition notion or aspect of revelation to its capacity to establish personal communion with God (Dulles 2002: loc. 169/242). Here the church as mystical body supersedes the institutional and transitions us from the notion of the church as mediating and transmitting revelation to being those who have already received revelation gathering to worship God (Dulles 2002: loc. 171/242).

We may model the relationship between general revelation, the individual believer, special revelation, and the priority of Tradition and Scripture to Catholics, the Word of God to Protestants, and the respective collapse of the ‘real’ presence of God in the Eucharist and Message in *Diagram 5.3 modern revelation theology* respectively for Catholics and Protestants below.

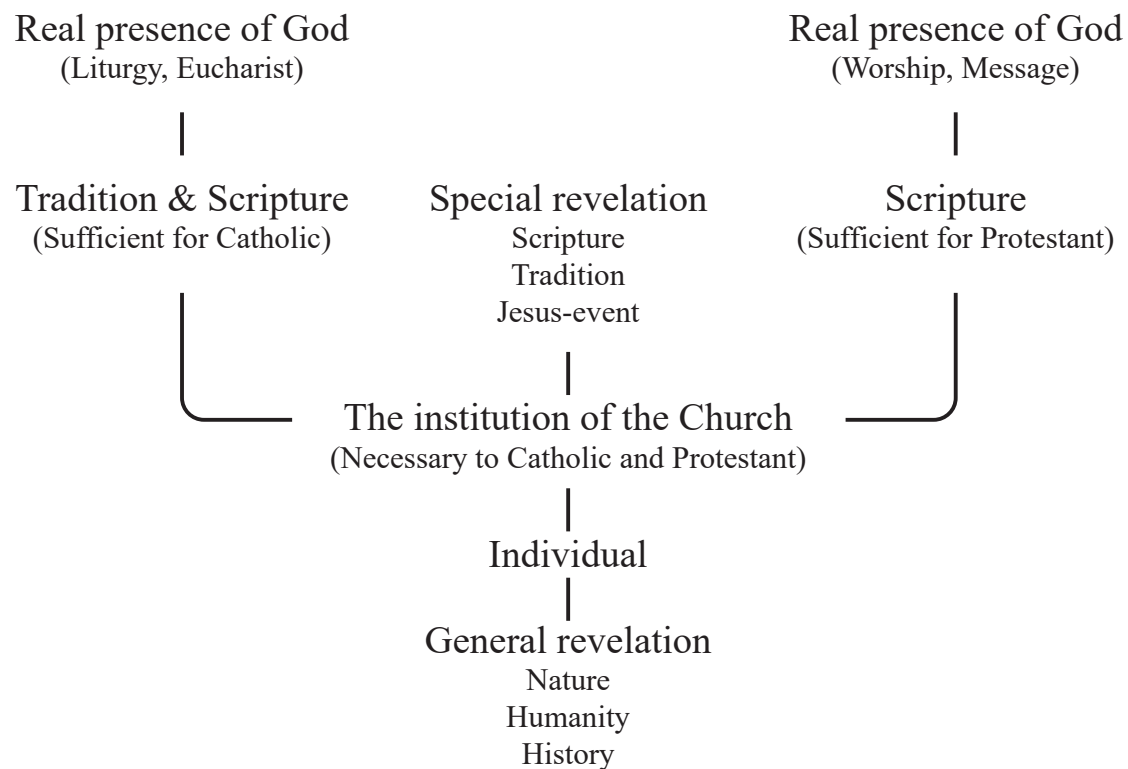


Diagram 5.3 modern revelation theology

5.4 CHRISTIAN RATIONALISM

There is perhaps a dichotomy between Reason and Experience within Modernity that results in the explication of Scripture in relation to Reason and the enculturated practice of faith being paradigmatically centred around the Eucharist and Message with a constellation of supporting activities such as worship, other sacraments, community, service, etc.

The Reformation guided by those modernizing Christianity within Modernity have perhaps translated Metaphysics as Rationalism. Guided by rationalism, it is not the silent worship of Fox or the practice of the Presence (*Šekîna*) (such as Brother Lawrence's) that defines the institutional church after the Reformation. Instead what prevails is personal transformation through reading and preaching of the Word that becomes central. It is established and recognised that Luther's experience of reading and lecturing Romans 1515-1517 enabled him to reach his conclusion regarding salvation by grace through faith alone. Over time, reading the Scriptures as the Word of God is linked to faith and coupled with all the certainties of rationalism. Notable contributors inadvertently linking Scripture and faith to reason alone may include, but not be limited to, the likes of Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), B.B. Warfield (1886-1902). Over time they argue for Scripture as the Word of God and, over time, the message becomes central to Reformation-descended churches. Though thinkers such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and Walter Brueggemann

(1933-present) don't entirely agree with the above, they're generally overridden by general consensus among evangelical Christians. One can readily see the foundations of contemporary evangelicalism as rooted in Pietism as personal devotion and as embracing Scripture as the Word of God. Christian rationalism is entirely related to Scripture and rationalism becomes the foundation of faith. This is understandable as the entire current of modern society is guided by rationalism.

Classical theology distinguishes between Special Revelation, understood as God's self-revelation in particular times and places to particular people culminating in the Jesus-event and the Scriptures, and General Revelation, understood as God's vague- and indirect-revelation at all times and in all places and through all things. But there is a dichotomy between "faith" and "experience" in Modernity wherein Reason is coupled to Special Revelation along with all the connotations thereof while Experience is increasingly coupled to General Revelation along with all associated denotations. The modern faith, as reconstructed, is practiced as paradigmatically centred on Reason and Special Revelation.²⁷

Through modernity classical theology transitions toward Evangelical-Protestant theology, an investigation of the faith in light of the challenges of Modernity and an expression of the faith according to the requirements of the modern Era and Modernity. When considering recent explorations of revelation in Christian thinking we must surely note lack of relational presence (*Šekîna*).

List 5.4.1 Christian rationalism

- 5.4.1.1 Tyson (2008:246) explores and critiques the "onto-theological assumptions underpinning" modernity and postmodernity, which distinguishes 'reason' from 'faith'. Here 'reason' is understood as that which is knowable, to the senses and their technological extensions allowing scientific verification while 'faith' is understood as speculative, as unavailable to the sense and unverifiable scientifically. It is this an '*a priori*' assumption that makes the exploration of "epistemology and transcendence" difficult (Tyson 2008:246). Through Modernity "perception becomes fundamental to all kinds of knowledge" (2008:257). Yet, as noted by Keener above. Modernity harbours a subconscious anti-supernaturalism that excludes and explains away any data (Keener 2011), thus excluding originating theistic experience from exploration in any empirical sense, while continuing with the assumption that religious experience is un-empirical and reliant on '*sui generis*' religious experience. The result, according to Tyson (2008: 258) is that the Transcendent and any experience thereof, such as *Šekîna*, becomes practically unverifiable and unexplorable. Any attempt to explore the Transcendent as true and meaning sets "reason against reason" (Tyson 2008:258) or perhaps better sets "the Reason of Modernity" against "the reasoning of and about the experience of the Transcendent". Tyson makes headway toward post-secular

27 Of course it doesn't help that the cults and mentally certifiable have been strong on religious experience, which requires a nuance in the research to account for such. Yet, in terms of exploring the self-revelation of *Christ* the experience of the transcendent as personal is a broad phenomenological category.

epistemology but does not focus on originating theistic experience, that is the tangible experience of God present to speak and act.

5.4.1.2 Spencer explores how Christian theology comes to link the knowability about God to the Jesus-event to Scripture as primary witness to said event as “analogy” (Spencer 2015) and makes such knowing about God synonymous with knowing God. Yet the coupling of Special Revelation to Jesus-event and analogy is with Modernity both “(in-)adequate and inevitable” (Spencer 2015:19). By saying that God has spoken in analogy and event (Spencer 2015:19) the notion of analogy becomes central and is essentially Christological (2015:20) and “doctrine of revelation as event” becomes intrinsically coupled with the “concept of theology as second-order witness to event” (2015:21). Christians see God as having answered the question of “Who is God?”, “What God is like?”, “How may we know God?”, and “What is God doing?” personally and directly to the Jesus-event seen as confirming humans as *‘imago dei’*, as the image of God, allowing for said revelation in Jesus to be the reliable, definitive, exclusive self-revelation of God. Hence, for Christians, it is Jesus-event coupled with the Scriptures which stand to as primary witness to the event which become the sole source of revelation form the backbone of Special Revelation. The infinite and transcendent God is thus not inaccessible but rather accessible via analogy and event in Jesus and via Scripture as witness to Jesus-event. Christianity is thus able to develop within the modern Era and Modernity around the Rationalism, Scientism and Special Revelation coupled together. Spencer makes headway on our speak-ability about/of God but on the subject of the experience-ability of God. Again, the key takeaway from Spencer is the unavailability of *Šekînâ* and the sufficiency of Scripture as the Word of God.

5.4.1.3 Schrijvers notes that the incarnation is an ‘ontic figure who fills the gap between the conditional, this world, and unconditional, the transcendent’ (2016:218), though this leaves us with an epistemological conundrum in relation to modern and post-Modern philosophy. Schrijvers (2016:218) notes that:

But to make things even worse, let me conclude with one more aporia: it is not certain whether it is because of this philosophical idea of incarnation that one, once, started to speak of a divine Incarnation, or, on the other way around whether it is because of the divine Incarnation that now speaks of philosophical and contingent incarnations.

Though Tyson makes headway regarding our “onto-epistemological foundations” and Spencer on our speak-ability of and about God, it is Schrijvers who draws us toward understanding that these explorations are conceptual and should not be mistaken for an exploration of originating theistic experience itself. As modern Christianity focuses on the Special Revelation didactically in relation to Scripture as Revelation and centres the practice of the modern Christian faith around the Message, i.e. what does Scripture say/teach/mean/encourage/etc., in relation to faith and living, there is little surprise then that the belief in the God of faith is interpreted as premodern pareidolia, as seeing patterns of connection, when applying evolutionary theory to the emergence of the Scriptures and as pareidolia when asking on what foundation this God is believed in a modern world.

Krüger (1995:44) thus argues that, in operation, ‘revelation is thus an aesthetic appreciation or appraisal’ of scripture, history, and church and (Krüger 1995:30) is a fideistic leap from text to belief in God. This is akin to Schrijvers critique of Marion’s phenomenology, that is that it is “a phenomenology without phenomenon” (Schrijvers 2016:209) in the sense that Krüger’s revelation is revelation without revelation?²⁸

According to Krüger, the God of revelation is viewed as a faith-construct derived propositionally from Scripture and not the some-One the faith engages as present to speak and act²⁹. Is this theistic notion of revelation one that originally stemmed from revelation itself or a notion of revelation alone that is read back into the Jesus-event and Scriptures? Irrespective of the philosophical problem, the ancient Buddhist parallel picks up from an historically similar chicken and egg scenario in relation to Brahmanism. This can be seen to remind us that, whatever the root, it remains a problem going forward that is related to experience itself. To quote from the *Tevijja Sutta*, and ancient Buddhist text. Quoting from Krüger’s (1989: 15) translation:

Vāseṭṭha, so in fact *Brahmā* has not been seen face tot (sic) face by any of the brahmans learned in the Three Vedas, nor by one their teachers, nor by any of the teachers of their teachers, nor by any one seven generations ago. Nor did even the ancient sages say: ‘We know, we see, whence and wither *Brahmā* is.’ These brahmans versed in the Three Vedas therefore really said: ‘We teach the path to companionship with what we do know and do not see (while claiming that this is the straight path, the way leading the person following it, directly to companionship with *Brahmā*).’

Within the secular age it has been valuable to couple Special Revelation to Scripture and Scripture as Reason is coupled with Science. The result has been gaining clarity toward Scripture as a reliable text, that is in relation to how it was produced, how it is interpreted, and on what historical foundation it is

28 In retrospect this is an assertion that requires more detailed exploration, this is in part explored in relation to Gotama’s critique of Brahmanism though the author wishes to engage more deeply.

29 Of course, Krüger is correct with this for a Christianity constructed in relation to Scripture and Reason and not in relation to God present to speak and act.

grounded. However, as the secular age struggles with ‘experience’ practicality in relation to philosophy, theology and science there is been insufficient investigation into originating theistic experience and its relation to faith and to the practice of the faith. The result has been insufficient exploration of *Šekîna*.

There is little wonder then, given the above evaluation of revelation, that the modern essentialist views revelation through the lens of evolutionary theory as applied to social, religious and linguistic development, finds evidence of ‘religious experience’ as the Personal Consciousness Experience and the Dualistic Mystical State, and links such to common introspective practices across diverging and seemingly irreconcilable faith traditions. For Christians have not yet explicated the relationship between the originating theistic experience reported in Scripture and the phenomenological equivalent thereof in their ongoing faith. And, if it is from Christians that Krüger and others have understood there to be a leap from text to faith, then Christians must take responsibility for explaining the relationship of the God of faith and the God of experience. For how can Essentialists arrive at any other conclusion regarding revelation as post-experiential editorial layer over the raw and common ‘religious experience’ when no such experience of *Christ* is meaningfully available, has been sufficiently explored and explained, or is included in the institutional church and the practice of the Christian faith?

Central to the theory/theology of theistic self-revelation is the notion that the Self-revealer is *Christ* continue to offer his own testimony in contrast to the theory that theism is the result human socio-cultural-linguistic faith construction in relation to the inexplicable transcendent. Within the secular age, Christians responded variously to the charges of Reason. We could consider fundamentalism, on one extreme, or liberalism, on the other extreme. Where Christian fundamentalism/fundamentalists do not take the questions of the secular age seriously we must also recognise that neither the Conservative nor Liberal Christians take revelation in its primary sense of *Self-revelation* (*Šekîna*) as primary, necessary or available. The result is that the Reformed mainstream well serves as a baseline for exploration alongside the Protestant-Evangelical. As explored above, the Reformed-Evangelical-Protestant faith has largely dealt with revelation in relation to Reason. Yet the ‘God after God’ conversations among postmodern philosophers and Essentialists are fairly critiquing Christianity for the lack of *Self-revelation* (*Šekîna*) in the faith. They can do no other than conclude on the non-realism of God.

It is here perhaps helpful to draw on some contributions related to reason and experience:

List 5.4.2 Developing notions of religious experience

- 5.4.2.1 Taves (2011) notion of ‘religious experience’ is problematic, which ought by now to be a given, and argues for an “attributional approach” and paradigmatic shift toward “experience deemed religious” that is complex and nuanced.
- 5.4.2.2 That the “experience deemed religious” is not necessarily congruous with the religion itself for a religion arises and redefines strongly connected to “experience deemed

religious” (Taves 2011:1156) but then, curiously, moves away there-from to the practices centered non-experientially, for instance on “the authority of texts, traditions, unbroken lines of transition” (Taves 2011: 1150) resulting in the creation of “...a relatively closed, self-authenticating system is created, such that, within the confines of the system, practices deemed efficacious by the group lead to the specific religious goals and the goals are, by definition, realised when the practices are enacted” (Taves 2011:1124).

Tave’s work is particularly informative as we can recognise this exact pattern in the counter-cultural turn to God within the secular age, where we see that the pursuit of and engagement with *Christ*, i.e. experience, plays a vital role in the spread and adoption of the modern Christian faith during the Great Awakenings and Revivals but that the Reformed faith, as enculturated within Modernity and centred on Reason, fails to resolve the experience of God and incorporate such into the practice of the faith, resulting in the modern faith meeting for second-order activities related to but not comprising experiential engagement with God.

5.4.2.3 Hollenback explores the connection between “mystical illumination”, the “contextuality of mystical experience” and “the psychological and parapsychological aspects of mystical experience”. In particular Hollenback (2000: loc.4810) notes that:

“While I acknowledge that many mystical experiences utilize the hallucinatory, fantasy-fabricating activities of the mind and that there are numerous, significant continuities that link mystical states of consciousness to dreaming, imagining, and even hypnotic trance, I maintain that mystical experience often operates so as to transfigure the dream-fabricating and imaginational activities of the mind so that they generate something very different from “ordinary” dreams or fantasies. They transform the imagination into an extraocular organ of perception and knowledge.”

Hollenback’s exploration is helpful in establishing a phenomenological link between Jesus-event and analogy and the role of Scripture as ambassadorial witness to and representation of Jesus. The Jesus-event becomes the definitive revelation of who God is and what humanity can be and was created for, but this is not linked to the experience of God. For instance, Jesus stated, “I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” (John 5:19, NIV). Jesus did not simply read Scripture as revelation but experienced the companionship of his Father, of the *YHWH* of Judaism as his *God the Father*. Similarly, the Apostle Paul’s stated, “My message and my preaching were not

with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Corinthians 2:4, NIV), again linking the self-revelation of God to experience rather than just to Scripture and Jesus-event. There is an early experiential-verification link between the good news of the kingdom of God in support thereof that remains open to exploration.

The result is that:

- a) The meaning of God can be fabricated imaginatively
- b) The meaning of God can be fabricated, however faithfully and accurately, in relation to Scripture, but may still exist entirely as mental construct
- c) The meaning of God can be constructed in relation to Scripture and Experience
- d) That for all its gains there is a loss between modern philosophy and Christian theooogy in not being able to distinguish 1.3.1 from 1.3.2 and ground 1.3.3 as important.

5.4.2.4 Dulles (1992) provides us with insight into Doctrine of Revelation in relation to *Revelation as Doctrine*, *Revelation as History*, *Revelation as Inner Experience*, *Revelation as Dialectical Presence*, and *Revelation as New Awareness*.

Dulles notes that there are significant challenges to the notion of revelation stemming from 'philosophical agnosticism, linguistic analysis, modern epistemology, empirical psychology, biblical criticism, the history of Christian doctrine, comparative religion, and critical sociology (1992: 6-8). Perhaps most informative is Dulles'(1992:3) summary of the problem of revelation:

“The great Western religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – are based on the conviction that the existence of the world and the final meaning and value of all that it contains ultimately depend on a personal God who, while distinct from the world and everything in it, is absolute in terms of reality, goodness, and power. These religions profess to derive their fundamental vision not from human speculation, which would be tentative and uncertain, but from God's own testimony—that is to say, from a historical given divine revelation.”

Dulles (1992:8-9) poses the question of what Christianity is apart from religion and proposes that:

“In a reconstructed Christianity, one could imagine, “revelation” could be conceived as a mythical way of describing sudden and transforming

insights that rise from the exercise of the latent powers of the human mind. In such a perspective the Scriptures would be valued as preserving the memory of the struggles and discoveries of a religiously gifted people. Jesus would be understood not as God incarnate but rather as a remarkable religious leader whose teaching could be revered as uniquely disclosive of God, at least to the community of his own disciples. The church would then be seen as the place in which the memory of Jesus is specifically preserved, in which the Scriptures are read with veneration, and in which efforts are made to cultivate a life conformed to the wisdom contained in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Christian faith would mean an attitude of mind characterised by special confidence in the biblical heritage as being a reliable path to spiritual growth.”

Dulles puts into words what Christianity is being viewed as by early essentialism, the Essentialists, and an ancient-contemporary critique of fideism. Yet this is also what Christianity amounts to when consider modern Catholicism and modern Protestant-Evangelical faith. For when God is ‘met with by faith’ and ‘not by experience’ then there is no equivalent expectation of special revelation as God present in Person. The result is that Christianity meets ‘about God’ in relation to religious and faith activities and then considers God to have been met with.

Though Christianity claims special revelation in relation to Jesus-event and Scripture there is no special revelation taking place for anyone or any expectation thereof. Christianity is, then, somewhat at odds with its earlier mystical roots where God’s relational presence was key.

In the absence of the clear experience of *Christ*, classical theology is an insufficient argument for the reality of *Christ* to atheists or even people raised as Christians. Speaking about faith as apart from experience is to make a saving faith something apart from a relationship. The practice of Christianity here essentially amounts to a rational pursuit for knowledge of *Christ* and faithfulness in character and public service to others in representation of *Christ*.

5.5 MODERN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

A recent study conducted by Willie Botha, David Bulger, and Karl Teichart is subtitled *Research on Christian leadership training needs in South Africa*. The results were surprising to the researchers. They had conducted polls ahead of the study which in no way indicated what the primary need emerging from the study would be. The surprise conclusion is that Christian leaders rate their number one need as intimacy for God (Botha *et al.* 2016: 78). In fact (Botha *et al.* 2016: 82) say that:

“When looking at the ‘Intimacy with God’ subject, the trend ... shows that, generally speaking, the longer a responded had been in ministry, the more likely he or she would express a need for development and growth in intimacy with God.”

Though this may sound like ‘the right thing to say’ it is a study on the unmet and future training needs of Christian leaders (Botha *et al.* 2016: 5). The report, in response to the study, is titled *A Cry for Intimacy with God*. Speaking objectively, in light of this research, we can acknowledge that God-absence is significantly prevalent across churches throughout South Africa and that it is likely that similar reports can be gathered throughout the modern world.

Given that even those leaders within Christianity committed to running the faith and nurturing the faithful are recognizing their God-hunger as related to God’s absence, it is not surprising that Essentialism, Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney confirm the absence of God through their observations³⁰. If even the leaders of contemporary Christianity recognise their God-hunger as tied to their experience of God’s absence, then that’s quite an indictment on a faith defining itself in relation to God’s availability and activity. The assertion that “God is” as not simply a confessional assertion that Christians can let go of. This confession that “God is” serves as pivotal, axiomatic and central to the Christian faith. The core foundation of the Judeo-Christian faith is intrinsically tied to the understanding and acceptance of the fact that a particular, transcendent and self-revealing some-One entered the experience of actual historical person,s made promises and fulfilled them over the course of generations across various cultures, and produced in cooperation with them a faithful written testament that’s foundational to the faith and its practices.

And it is this assertion that has driven an ongoing “God after God” conversation within Christianity. And throughout the experience of God’s presence is tied to the mystics preceding Modernity and within it is widespread in connection wit the Great Awakenings (also Renewal or Revival) where God is experienced as drawing new in Person to speak and act. The bridge between the ‘God after God’ conversations focus perhaps less on God’s absence than the possibility of God. Yet this discussion takes place in relation to a largely Orthodox Christianity, now Catholic and Protestant, that’s descended from the Reformation.

Modern Christianity is the Christian after Christendom as now Catholicism and Protestantism. It is also metaphysics translated as rationalism. As such, neither Christendom nor Christianity make the experience of God, and therewith mysticism, their focus. The focus is on the institution of the church, making the Reformation a Magisterial Reformation and not a paradigmatic redefinition of Christianity.

The thinking of Christians in Modernity runs on a parallel line to that of postmodern philosophy and the philosophy of religion. Within Modernity philosophy is working out the implications of letting go of metaphysics, but we do not find politics or mainstream Christian thinking doing this. Here the

³⁰ The discussion on Essentialism precedes this and a discussion on Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney will follow

metaphysics of Christendom is worked out as the rationalism of modern Christianity resulting in a “faith apart from works and apart from experience”.

Where postmodern philosophers come to agree with Eastern philosophy on *Emptiness*, and perhaps even science at a deeper ontological level on *Śūnyatā*, Christians first translate the metaphysics of Christendom into the rationalism of Modernity as support for the institution of the church. Where the postmodern philosophers are still on the track of deconstructing Christianity the Christian thinkers remain on track translating metaphysics.

Christian spirituality ends up being relegated to character formation even when translating the contemplative and ascetic practices of earlier mystics for modern people. One is hard-pressed to find acknowledgment of Christian mysticism within non-academic works on Christian spirituality. Christian mysticism is not well explored as a critical conversation partner with modern Christianity. Christianity is instead expressed within Christianity as in keeping with the institution of the church and not in keeping with monasticism. This is partly because monasticism came to be hosted as a sub-culture within Christendom under the church and Protestants rejected monasticism.

Though Foster notes the “spiritual bankruptcy” of himself and his congregation and realised that a minister what he “said had no power to help people” as they were “starving for a word from God, and I had nothing to give them. Nothing.” (Foster 1978:2%). As such, Foster recognised exactly the same kind of spiritual malnutrition within himself as has recently been noted as a lack of “intimacy with God” (Teichart *et al.* 2016:78). Willard notes that when experiencing such that “... most Christians had been told by me as by others to attend the services of the church, give of time and money, pray, read the Bible, do good to others, and witness to their faith” (Willard 1999: loc.18/251). This did not result in a life of engaging God. In fact, “please and sound schemes of Christian education, church growth, and spiritual renewal came round to this disappointing result” (Willard 1999: loc.18/251).

The answer is put forward as the spiritual disciplines, as the exercises of Christ and the spiritual greats within Christian history. Foster categorises the disciplines as “inward” (our own walk - meditation, prayer, fasting, study), “outward” (our interface with the world - simplicity, solitude, submission, service), and “corporate” (shared with others - confession, worship, guidance, celebration) (cf. Foster 1972). Willard categorises them as “disciplines of engagement” (connecting us to the needs of others and God’s heart and has in the world - solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice (Willard 1999: loc.158/251)) and “disciplines of abstinence” (teaches us that we are human beings not human doings and detaches us from the “hurry, clutter and busyness” to connect with God - study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission (Willard 1999:158/251)). In contrast, Calhoun views the disciplines as “intentional means of opening space in our lives for the worship of God and that such is effectively embodied” (Calhoun 2015:22; also Willard 1999: loc.19/251) and connects the spiritual disciplines to our “desires” (Calhoun 2015:13-16) and the “rhythms of life” the rhythms of life in ordered monastic communities (Calhoun 2015:19), as “constant

channels and disciplines of grace”. These disciples are viewed as “ways to keep the company of Jesus” (Calhoun 2015:20) and through which we are transformed into the image of Jesus (Calhoun 2015:11) or Christlikeness. These disciplines are viewed as “constant channels and disciplines of grace”. These disciples are viewed as “ways to keep the company of Jesus” (Calhoun 2015:20) and through which we are transformed into the image of Jesus (Calhoun 2015:11) or Christlikeness. The mystics are drawn on as people “who knew God” (Foster 1997:3%) and their disciplines appropriated for modern people. These practices are viewed as training Christians toward Christlikeness and tied to our reading of the Scriptures, reflection upon them, appropriating the practices for ourselves and then enacting or practicing them till they become habits.

Christian spirituality often focuses on character formation and faithful living while notions of companionship, or perhaps even intimacy, with *Christ* becomes relegated to great Christian saints and mystics and is not considered normative. Christian spirituality is thus susceptible to precisely the critique levelled by Gotama to ancient Brahmanism, that it is the pursuit of the unknown-Transcendent rather than a some-One.

Foster takes the divine paradigm as the imitation of Christ, of being like Christ to become like Christ in character.

List 5.5.1 Foster’s streams

- 5.5.1.1 The **divine paradigm** for humans is **the imitation of Christ**. Here there’s a reflection on the life of Christ (Foster 1998: loc.2/273) and brings together all the Christian traditions (Foster 1998: loc.3/273).
- 5.5.1.2 The **contemplative tradition** is that of a prayer-filled life, a discovery of and return to the inner sanctuary of the soul where we meet with and are accompanied by God (Foster 1998: loc.23/273) This is the presence of God (Foster 1998: loc.24/273). This is the inward-outward contemplative journey that Christian mysticism may be reduced to (Foster 1998: loc.23-57/273), albeit understood as the “steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us” (Foster 1998: loc.48/273). With our access to Christ mediated by Tradition and Scripture, the “steady gaze” requires a deeper exploration not conducted here.
- 5.5.1.3 The **holiness tradition** the discovery is all about the virtuous life (Foster 1998: loc.59/273) of holiness of heart and life (Foster 1998: loc.96/273), training into godliness valuable in this life and the next which has the contemplative practice of prayer as its foundation (Foster 1998: loc.59/273). Ultimately it is about being “response-able” as doing what needs to be done appropriately within relationships and society (Foster 1998: loc.82/273).
- 5.5.1.4 The **charismatic tradition** is the discovery of a Spirit-Empowered life or the *charisms* also understood as the gifts of the Spirit and the nurturing of fruit by the Spirit (Foster

1998: loc.98-123/273). It is the recognition that we live our lives in cooperation with God, shaped by the reality of God's reign, expressed as life in and through the Spirit of God (Foster 1998: loc.125/273).

- 5.5.1.5 The **social justice tradition** is the discovery of a compassionate life enabling people to live better in the world and improve the lives of others including the social structures of society (Foster 1998: loc.136/273). God calls us to a life of social justice: personal, social, institutional. And this call is for the benefit of all peoples (Foster 1998: loc.182/273).
- 5.5.1.6 The **evangelical tradition** is the discovery of the Word-centred life focused on proclaiming the Gospel and its best paired with the social justice movement (Foster 1998: loc.186/273). The evangelical tradition includes: the proclamation of the gospel; the centrality of Scripture as a faithful repository of the gospel; and the confessional witness of the earthly Christian community as a faithful interpretation of the gospel (Foster 1998: loc.218/273). The Bible is given to us as the Word of God written and is the infallible rule of faith as illuminated and guided by the Spirit (Foster 1998: loc.232/273).
- 5.5.1.7 The **incarnational tradition** is the discovery of the sacramental life as the daily or ordinary life (Foster 1998: loc.236/273). The incarnational tradition is concerned with the relationship between spirit and matter, with God manifesting through the material means of ourselves (Foster 1998: loc.236/273). Our embodied self becomes the tabernacle of the Holy (Foster 1998: loc.271/273).

Christianity bases its pedigree on the church and not monasticism or mysticism. The practice of the Christian mystics is stripped of asceticism (Willard 1999: loc.130-150/251). The classical aesthetic is an athlete training their body, mind, and spirit and not one who contrasts the enjoyment of life punishment impoverished punishment (Willard 1999: loc.148/251). Here "ascetic" is taken from "*askesis*" and means "exercise and training" (Venter 2018: Ms.154). The monastics withdrew from the world in order to be in it and not to escape it (Willard 1999: loc.147/251). And Protestants have rejected "works of salvation" in favour of "grace for faith and salvation". Protestantism ties the spiritual disciplines to the attaining forgiveness from God and avoiding punishment by God rather than as "exercises unto godliness" (Willard 1999: loc.144/251). The result is now having to regain contemplative vital and vitalizing practices. Therefore Willard (1999: loc.18/251) says that:

"For the serious churchgoing Christians, the hindrance to their spiritual growth is not unwillingness... I could no longer deny the facts. I finally decided their problem was a theological deficiency, a lack in teaching, understanding, and practical direction. And the

problem, I also decided, was one that the usual forms of ministry and teaching obviously do not remedy”

The spiritual disciplines differ from the usual teaching of the church in that they are embodied practices (Willard 1999: loc.19/251). Christians do not lack for knowledge or understanding or effort, but rather lack for the practical means for living spirituality. For Willard, “our spiritual growth stems from what we do with our lives, from the habits we form, and from the character that results” (Willard 1999: loc.20/251). In fact, for Willard: “Full participation in the life of God’s kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through the appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit” (Willard 1999: loc.26/251).

List 5.5.2 Willard’s understanding of formative spirituality

- 5.5.2.1 Formative training enables a new power as the individual breaking with their past life and the living into their new life as entering kingdom of God, accompanied by a release of forgiveness. Therewith both repentance and forgiveness are given by God (cf. Psalms 90:3; 85:4; Acts 5:32; Rom.2:4; 2 Tim.2:25) (Willard 1999: loc.39/251).
- 5.5.2.2 This is accompanied by a developing transformation of the individual’s character along with their attitude and personality (2 Cor.5:17; Rom.5:1-5; 2 Pet. 1:4-11) (Willard 1999: loc.39/251).
- 5.5.2.3 A significant, extra human power over the evils of this present age and world, exercised both by individuals and the collective church (Matt. 28:18) (Willard 1999: loc.39/251).

This can only result from a positive view of the body, of this life and of our relationships (Willard 1999: loc.41/251). In fact, according to Willard (1999: loc.42/251), the:

“Human body was made to be the vehicle of human personality ruling the earth for God and through his power. Withdrawn from that function by loss of its connection with God, the body is caught in the inevitable state of corruption in which we find it now. To readjust our view of the possibilities of our body and the spiritual life the body can experience... who we are and what spiritual life is”

Instead of being opposed to the body and this life in the world, the spiritual life is a deep embrace of the body and everything and everyone in this life. Instead, the practice of the spirituality disciplines is meant to expose “and put to the death the false self, the old sin nature, to uncover and nurture our new nature in Christ, our true self”. Their withdrawal was not “*ontological* (“the world is evil”) but *eschatological* (God’s kingdom has come), and thus *missional* (as witness to the world)” (Venter 2018: MS: 154). Drawing on the Christian mystics is curious.

List 5.5.3 Contradictory relationship between the mystics and their usage in modern Christianity

- 5.5.3.1 Though the Christian mystics are drawn on as great examples of what Christians can and ought to be, they are not explored in terms of their mystical theology or their immediate experience of God. Instead their practices are drawn on as potentially revitalizing the Christian faith.
- 5.5.3.2 Christian mysticism has long been considered taboo, with the ideas of the mystics not being discussed. Ponsonby, by way of example, considered mysticism to have arisen as a reaction to the “arid and abstracted philosophical theology of scholasticism” (Ponsonby 2015:34). And further that movements viewed as focusing on the interior life of the individual than on the ecclesiastical structures and sacramental externals of the church resulted in the elevation of personal visions over Scripture and therewith the “loss of control of the Scripture and the rather iconoclastic rejection of many of the church’s structures” with the result being that of significant “deviations from the historical faith” (Ponsonby 2015:37).
- 5.5.3.3 This means that the spiritual disciplines are viewed as invitational opportunities for conversations with God through facing the deeper or inner self or nature of the self. But this must take place within the church and one’s relationship with God is primarily in the context of and through the medium of the church.

This, however, does not make sense. On one hand those seeking an authentic and vibrant spirituality for Christians are selling the very practices of the mystics to us on the basis that they produced exemplars of the faith—people who really knew God and were Christlike in character. Yet more systematic theologians argue that these same mystics hold dangerous teachings that will lead us astray if we make the interior life our priority. This is possibly due to contemplative prayer being revived in recent decades and the prejudice of Western Christians against mysticism declining. Mysticism has been viewed as “esoteric spirituality, ‘deeper life’ elitism, legalistic asceticism, and the fear of New Age/Eastern mysticism” (Venter 2018: MS: 51).

There appears to be no recognition of the development and contributions of the new or vernacular mysticism leading up to and overlapping the Reformation (cf. McGinn 1998, 2005, 2012) or the contributions of the mystics to the Reformation. Instead, everything is credited to Luther. et the most significant influences on Luther are perhaps John Tauler (c.1300-1361) and *Theologia Deutsch* (c.1300s). These also influenced Pietism, as coined by Spener (1635-1705) in *Pia Desideria* (1675) as well as Arndt’s (1555-1621) *True Christianity* (1606-1610).

Anthony of Egypt (251-356) was perhaps the first to articulate the threefold path with Pseudo Dionysius (early 6th century) the first to make use of the phrase “mystical theology”. The threefold

path of an ascetic-mystic paradigm was thus established early in Christian thinking (Venter 2018: MS:154).

Apophatic practice was an important part of Christian meditation (Venter 2018: MS:155) serving as two distinct types of prayer in Christian spirituality. Here meditation is understood as “mental effort, using all our senses and faculties in our experience of God” and contemplation the stilling and silencing of the same (Venter 2018: MS:51). The former is *cataphatic* or “positive/affirmative” and the latter *apophatic* or “negative/emptying”. The themes of Christian spirituality are similar to those of Christian mysticism:

List 5.5.4 Similar themes in Christian mysticism and Christian contemplative spirituality

- 5.5.4.1 **Inner transformation.** Accomplished through the disciplines. This may be roughly equivalent to the *Via Purgativa* or “Way of Purgation” in the West and “prayer of the lips” in the East. This is the “purification of the body/soul” (Venter 2018: MS:153). The purpose of this stage is to purify us from our sinful vices by training us toward Christ’s virtues (Venter 2018: MS:155). When considering Christian spirituality today, it is the imitation of Jesus and therewith the beginning of the contemplative ascetic life as understood by the church fathers (Venter 2018: MS:158).
- 5.5.4.2 **Self-awareness.** Attained through the disciplines. This may be roughly equivalent to the *Via Illuminata* or “Way of Illumination” in the West and “prayer of the mind” in the East. This is the “illumination of the mind/intellect” (Venter 2018: MS:153). The purpose of this stage is illuminate the purified mind by shifting from active practices to passive enlightenment (Venter 2018: MS:155).
- 5.5.4.3 **Openness to God.** Our innate need expressed as availability. This may be roughly equivalent to the *Via Unitiva* or “Way of Union” in the West and “*theosis*” in the East. This is the “union of heart/mind with God”. Here “*theosis*” is ‘the union with God by participating in the divine nature, without confusion of the divine and human persons’ (Venter 2018: MS:153). Here God is contemplated directly and the mystic experiences unmediated mystical knowledge of God in *apophatic* union with the Father as more intimate yet more distant (Venter 2018: MS:155).

Venter notes that the above is also known as “the Trinitarian way, because is through the Son (purgation) by the Spirit (illumination) to the Father (union), in keeping with Trinitarian theology from the 4th century onwards” (Venter 2018: MS:153).

However, modern Christian spirituality as contemplative spirituality is at once the very beginnings of a practical mysticism and therewith the *Way of Purgation*. It is encouraged under the curation of the church as a means of addressing the meaninglessness of Christianity. However, the active, affirmative, sensoral or *cataphatic* dimension can readily be viewed as an aesthetic

alone. Here Christians have a *cataphic* aesthetic focused on Christ with the contents of their '*lectio divina*' drawn from the library of Christian history. Considering the argument of the Essentialists, Christianity appears to agree. There is no clarity here that "God is and can be known" and no practical exploration of the *Šekînâ* as a foundational element to monotheism. Here though reported earliest in Judaism it is central to the origin Christianity and Islam. Surely one could accomplish the same "character transformation" toward Buddha-likeness or Brahma-likeness through a *cataphic* practice in relation to the '*lectio divina*' drawn respectively from the libraries of Buddhists and the Hindus instead of the Christians? modern Christian spirituality then shares in God-absence.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Where modernity proved incapable of addressing deep human needs the institutional church is viewed as an alternative to society. And as an alternative it addresses those deeper needs by drawing on a long heritage of practices and the library of Christian contributions. Within this library one can find inspiration for living and therefore know God by knowing about God.

Yet when reflecting upon modern Christian theology and spirituality it lies in agreement with Modernity and Essentialism. The concept of non-realism applies equally to values as to Christian and religious beliefs. They are all predicated upon a library of texts and the deeper psychological needs within people. And as such the deconstruction of Christianity does not reveal the God who is but that God is not. For all the certainties of modern Christianity the institutional expression of the church makes little to no provision for relational engagement with God. And though the faith is being reviewed by those exploring what Christianity 'is', the newer expression of communalism serves more as the institutional church in translation than an approximation of the "*ekklesia tou theou*". We thus find that modern Philosophy, Essentialism, Christian Theology and Christian Spirituality all agreeing on the absence of God and mutually supporting each other in that agreement. Christianity then serves more as the metaphysics of the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) in translation as rationalism and institutionalism than as relating to God.

Within modern Christianity the metaphysics of Christendom is replaced with the rationalism of the secular age. Christianity does not rely on God's objective realism as its foundation. Instead, Christianity relies on psychological realism coupled with Tradition and Scripture as its objective foundations. This results in a faith secured against a modern and secular rationalism and the pluralism of religions. Yet the faith must be appraised as somehow at odds with the vital and foundational dimension of *Self-revelation* (*Šekînâ*). It is here that *anatheism* opens the question of God on its own terms rather than as facing a neo-Kantian court of reason that already concluded on God's objective non-realism. It is with this in mind that we pick up the next chapter.

Anamnētheism

There are various ‘God after God’ conversations that have taken place within the secular age. These include: (1) modern philosophy which arrives at the “Emptiness” of the “self” and our world(view)s including their religions and is agreed upon by Eastern and Western philosophy; (2) Essentialism which argues for a common development of the human consciousness through introversive practices and experiences across the diversity of consecutive and parallel world(view)s; and (3) Christian rationalism which serves perhaps as metaphysics in translation in the post-Christendom institutional expression of the church as Catholicism and Protestantism, their associated theologies in relation to each other and Modernity, and modern Christian spirituality as contemplative and formational in keeping with Essentialism. In common lies the absence of God.

And though all seem to agree on the absence of God not everyone agrees on the God-absence within people. Practically speaking, it matters not whether people believe God is real or not real so long as we arrive at the same values and character formation is embraced as progressive, harmonious and enabling and fundamentalism rejected as regressive, disharmonious and disabling. These streams agree on the God-absence and therewith require metaphysics and rationalism to support the institutional church whether supported by Tradition or the Word of God.

The returning question of God follows the ‘God after God’ conversations afresh on its own terms and merits exploration toward a Christianity or mysticism after the secular age.

6.1 VARIETIES OF ANATHEISM

The *anatheim* of Kearney³¹ is a ‘God after God’ conversation supported by Caputo as an openness and availability. It is a religion without religion that leaves behind the metaphysics of the sacral age and the rationalism of the secular age along with the religious institutions that have developed in relation to them and followed on from each other pretending to be the same.

As understood by Kearney (2011, 2016), is neither the choice for the dogmatic theism of Christendom and Christianity nor the militant *anti*-theism of the secular age. It is, instead, *ana*-theism as in a new consideration of theism. It is the question of God returning again after the-death-of God and perhaps

31 The author is aware of a publication on Kearney that was due, but has not been published yet. As such, this is not a review of Kearney's work. In so speaking, it is also not a review of Cupitt or Caputo either. These are a collection of complex thinkers and writers who weave philosophy like fabric to paint pictures. In contrast, this author could but fudge a brush stroke. Instead, as they each encourage a post-Christian and post-Modern philosophy perhaps synoptically expresses and elucidates each other they are drawn on as encouraging a mysticism (Cupitt), religion (Caputo) and spirituality (Kearney) "after" Modernity.

after the ‘God after God’ conversations that have preceded. It is open to the fluidity of society without having to seek the certainty and stability promised by the Enlightenment. It is perhaps undecided and open. But it differs from the *amnetheism* of Cupitt, taken from the Greek ‘*amnesia*’ and meaning ‘forgetting’ or ‘losing the memory of’.

A third type of *anatheism* to consider is perhaps that of *anamnētheism* taken from ‘*anamnēsis*’, Greek for “remembering” or “recalling that something has been forgotten”. This is like remembering or recalling that someone who has been present is now absent, who has been speaking has fallen silent, and who has been in close proximity is now distant. It is in this sense that we here begin a ‘God after God’ conversation in keeping with God’s relational presence (*Šekîṇā*). The conversations to date have followed on from God’s absence, but there are enough cracks in modern certainty to allow the question of God to return. And here it doesn’t have to be explained on the basis of the terms and conditions of modernity dichotomises objectivity and subjectivity and, in a cyclopean sense, never permits the returning question of God to be investigated. Here we seek to open such an investigation recognizing that space does not permit us to complete such an investigation. Doing so is at once unfair, irresponsible and incomplete. Yet it is entirely necessary that it be so. After all, the sacral era of the Western and Christian world(view)s endured for 1200 years and that of modernity for the last 500. They are complex and nuanced world(view)s co-constructed by various contributors and some of them, no doubt, some of the greatest thinkers to date. To offer an *anamnētheism* as though complete would, then, be absurd and arrogant. Nevertheless, it would be equally absurd to adopt one of the world-religions. Cupitt (2011: loc.873/2281) notes that:

“All of the three ancient faiths that claim to be universal are in practice found to be rooted in, and to privilege, one cultural area, one ethnic group, one language and one local tradition. But full-scale globalization of the newest kind threatens in due course to assimilate and swallow up all our received differences of national, religious and ethnic tradition. Every great religion everywhere will soon be no more than a tourist attraction, a set of local folkways, stuff that (frankly) nobody any longer dreams of taking seriously.”

This kind of *anatheism* is a recollection of the God who has been forgotten in the Christianity of Christendom and of Modernity. It is a recollection without having to adopt the Christian religions. We are not seeking to establish or support the Christianity of Modernity as now Catholicism or Protestantism on its rational and institutional terms nor the Christianity of Christendom on its Christian-Aristotelian terms. It is, instead a hermeneutic of retrieval in order to stand alongside the mystics not as repeating a rationalised ‘*askesis*’ toward Christlikeness but as a religion without religion shaped by the invitation that is followed by a waiting and longing for the relational presence of God.

The new era of philosophy follows the 1960s and the-death-of God as a continuing outworking of the Copernican Revolution during which science and religion divorced following the-death-of metaphysics. Postmodern philosophy comes to agree on Emptiness with Eastern Philosophy following Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Yet it also agrees that the dichotomy between empiricism and experience and science and religion are no longer serving us as well as they did earlier in Modernity. Instead the recognition is that as defined within Modernity we are not able to explore 'spirituality', 'religion' and 'mysticism' on their own terms. Instead, these have been explored on the terms set by one or another, usually Western, group. Hence the collapse of all religions first into Christianity and later all religions into Buddhism. Or the reduction of God to a purely subjective experience as a projection of human consciousness.

With thinkers such as Cupitt, Caputo and Kearney wrestling with what mysticism 'is', they perhaps represents the beginnings of a mysticism 'after' modernity. Here Cupitt offers a way forward without metaphysics, rationalism and a realist understanding of God; Caputo a hermeneutics in agreement with Cupitt and Kearney³²; and Kearney an *anatheim* as in a new expression of theism not rooted in metaphysics or rationalism but instead in the relational context of the individual in the context of their lives.

6.2 GOD-ABSENCE

It would appear that the 'God after God' conversations we have explored all share a selection bias, albeit one that is understandable and acceptable. Their appraisal of Christianity as devoid of God-experience is not without merit and it appears that modern Christianity is not seeking to address this. These authors all appraise Christianity in light of God's absence and offer relevant post-theistic trajectories in light thereof. Though they do not take into account the prevalent God-experience among Christians, it is because Christianity as a whole is not characterised by such.

6.2.1 GOD-ABSENCE AS SPIRITUALITY

The spirituality of the Essentialist, and even of Christianity, appears to agree that God is not objectively real. This is because the objective availability of God is discounted in modern Christianity. As such, God's relational presence as *Self-revelation* (*Śekīnā*) has little to no place in modern Christianity and spirituality. The former recognises the latter as fideism and the latter their fideism as the most authentic

³² The author is aware of a publication on Kearney that was due, but has not been published yet. As such, this is not a review of Kearney's work. In so speaking, it is also not a review of Cupitt or Caputo either. These are a collection of complex thinkers and writers who weave philosophy like fabric to paint pictures. In contrast, this author could but fudge a brush stroke. Instead, as they each encourage a post-Christian and post-Modern philosophy perhaps synoptically expresses and elucidates each other they are drawn on as encouraging a mysticism (Cupitt), religion (Caputo) and spirituality (Kearney) "after" Modernity.

expression of their faith. They both, then, make God-absence key to their respective expression of spirituality.

For Cupitt (1998:4) language “is the interface between subjectivity and the public world. It is with language that we construct the inner and outer world”. This is the same for Caputo and Kearney as building on Heidegger. Cupitt proposes a/the “religion of Being” (Cupitt 1998:6) and Caputo puts forward retrieval of what is traditionalised (Caputo 1987: 96), the repetition of the “reproductive process of reactivating the founding acts of the first geometers” (Caputo 1987:) as less “the way historical people ‘dwells’ than “the constellation of art, science, and political arrangements within which they live out their lives” (Caputo 1987: 236). There is thus a difference in the way in which life is lived out by people in different world(view)s. Caputo’s “play” thus approximates Cupitt’s be-ing and be(com)ing and each mirror’s Kearney’s *anatheism*, which is not surprising given that both work from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927) (cf. Tracy in Kearney 2016: loc.220/287). And we wrestle with how to get from the way in which life is given to us within a world(view) and therefore the way in which we are the subjects of our world(view). Both seek to get us past the world(view)s that have determined our world(view)s, as in Christendom and Modernity, to a new way of be-ing as makers of a new world(view). The goal is to be like “Meister Eckhart, Kierkegaard and Husserl, Heidegger and Derrida” and also Cupitt and Caputo’s “great masters of disruption, of thinking through and thinking against the grain of everyday conceptions” (Caputo 1987: 268).

Where Cupitt seeks to rid us of God after our conceptions of God have collapsed, Caputo desires that we are rid of our “conceptions which we have devised about God” (Caputo 1987: 268) in order that we may be “confronted then with the truly divine God (*der göttliche Gott*) who refuses to submit to this human nonsense” (Caputo 1987: 269). Here we are not supposed to be making the “belief for” or “belief against” the focus as in the religions rooted “an intellectual position we take with regard to the world, but a way of immersing ourselves in that world” (Rollins 2015: 11). By this Rollins means that our beliefs are not the point and that we can assert our beliefs and therewith expose our unbelief (Rollins 2012: loc.494/1969). We can let go of whatever ideas we fixate about God “and ‘go after’ God again” (Kearney 2016: loc.17/287). According to Kearney (2016:loc.8/287), we can let go of the idea of the “... sovereign and divine superintendent of the universe” in order to “enjoy the possibility of opening oneself, once again, to the original and enduring promise of the sacred stranger, an absolute other who comes as a gift, call, summons, as invitation to hospitality and justice.”

Cupitt moves to a non-realist view of God (Cupitt 2011:890/2281) following on from the-death-of God, Caputo toward an “openness” (cf. Caputo 1987) along similar lines to Kearney who offers us an *ana-theism* (Kearney 2010: loc.3/248). Here *ana-* is a prefix as in “anew” and therewith as “God after God” and perhaps better “God *after* God” (Kearney 2016: loc.6/287) as moving “*forward* and not *backward*” as a return to God *again* and *after* the loss of God (Kearney 2016: loc.7/287).

Yet Kearney puts into words the fact that we have long been forced to choose between two poor options. One is “dogmatic theism”, which Cupitt calls a “nostalgic realist theology” (Cupitt 1984: loc.4738/5689) and even militant fundamentalism, and the other an militant atheism” (Kearney 2010: loc.3/248). Instead, Kearney offers us a third alternative as “*ana-theos*, God after God” (Kearney 2010: loc.3/248), where there is space to play between “anatheistic theism and anatheistic atheism” (Kearney 2010: loc.183/248). Kearney (2010: loc.166/248) says regarding *anatheism* that:

It is not some new religion, but attention to the divine in the stranger who stands before us in the midst of the world. It is a call for a new acoustic attuned to the presence of the sacred in flesh and blood. It is *amor mundi*, love of the life-world as embodiment of infinity in the finite, of transcendence in immanence, of eschatology in the now”

To some extent this is a “recalling of the past and anticipating the future” (Kearney 2016: loc.14/287) with the acceptance that the “God who has already come is always still to come” (Kearney 2016: loc.17/287). In summary, Kearney (2016: loc.17/287) states:

In sum, the *anatheist* God is one of perpetual departing and arriving, conjoining negative capability with constant rebirthing of the divine in the ordinary. For me, this double sense of leaving and returning is the heart of the sacred. And it may express itself either spiritually (as a general gracious openness to “something more”) or religiously (involving creedal commitments and devotions). *Anatheism* can be either an *anatheist theist* or an *anatheist atheist*, but whichever one chooses—belief or nonbelief—*anatheism* remains a wager.”

Between Cupitt and Kearney we move from God-absence in Cupitt’s *amnetheism* and God-absence in Kearney’s *anatheism*. There is thus a conjunction between the two. The *anatheist*, however, does choose God-absence alone as the substance of their spirituality. If that is the case the, speaking practically, there’s no difference between the *amnetheist* and *anatheist*. Yet the *anatheist* does not seek an *amnetheism*, a “forgetting of God” only to remain in the God-absence of modern Christianity and have God as “real for me” as predicated upon their heart and mind. The *amnetheist* does not choose to stand in God-absence and make such their spirituality, but instead chooses to let go of God completely. The *anatheism* of Kearney, however, stands in God-absence but does not seek to make its home there. The *anatheist* can respect the value and role of God-absence in the spirituality of others, including the Christian and *amnetheist*. But what’s most important is that the *anatheist* is open to the impossibility of God and therefore vulnerable to the possibility that God may not exist and the impossibility that God may. Yet the post-Christian, as in the individual letting go of Christianity of modernity with its faith despite and in the face of God-absence, can seek the presence of God for

themselves and others. They can seek the presence of the God who has already been present to others before Christendom and within it. They can seek the presence of the God who was present to those before Christianity as Catholicism and Protestantism and within. As a postmodernist one can readily step past or beyond the Christianity of modernity, and therewith stand as post-Christian. Yet one does not have to establish their new reality as entirely dependent on the emptiness of the self, society and cosmos. One can stand as non-positionally open to God, as inviting God to draw near in Person. One can stand alongside those Christian mystics who had a mystical theology in Christendom and those who did not in the modern era. There is much room in this new and emerging world(view). It can include those who stand between the cracks of the religions and the space in-between as a non-positional position. And it can also include those who stand after the Christianity of Modernity in the same cracks and spaces as non-positionally open to the God who was and is and is to come. Here one can choose to stand within Christianity as having great faith with their spirituality inextricably bound with God-absence. Yet to choose God's relational presence is to stand beyond the Christianity of Christendom and the modern Christianity that is now Catholicism and Protestantism. It is to stand as no-longer-a-Christian as non-positionally open to God.

For the Christian who seeks a Christianity after the Christianity of Modernity (which itself is the Christianity after Christendom. We may note the divide in thinking as per *Diagram 6.1.1 God-absence in modern thinking* below.

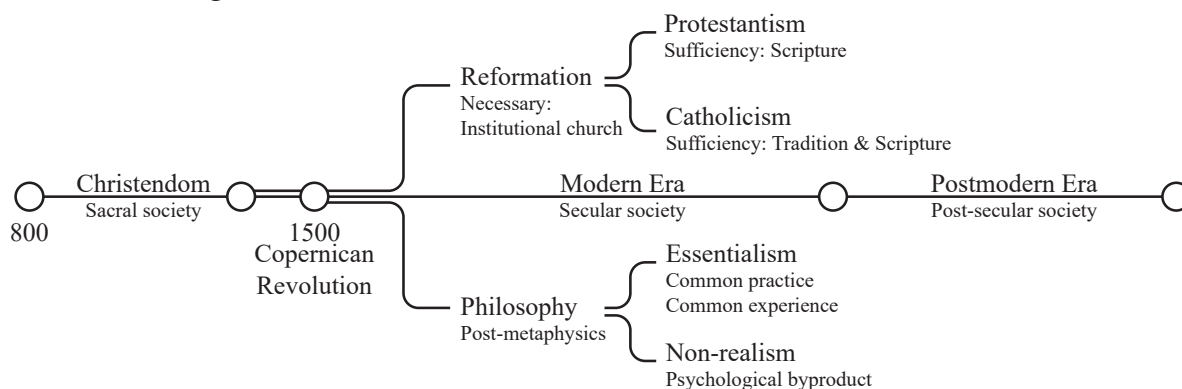


Diagram 6.2.1 God-absence in modern thinking

6.2.2 GOD-ABSENCE AS SELECTION BIAS

With the divorce between science and religion following the Copernican Revolution it is easy to understand that those deeply committed to metaphysics are as unlikely to hear those committed to empiricism and vice versa. However, their respective specialties and niche languages differ from one another. This makes it difficult to translate what either says to the other as the same words can carry completely different meanings. As long as one holds to the 'belief for' and the other 'belief against' there is little hope of investigating the 'experience of' the transcendent whether impersonal

or personal. There is, however, a growing body of material that indicates that there is a selection bias among modernists, whether Christian or non-Christian, that keeps us from the actual mystical experience reported in a variety of world(view)s.

Szasz explores *The Legend of Ulysses in Schizophrenia: The sacred symbol of Psychiatry* (1988) which we take here to serve as an example of the kind of selection bias we see in the ‘God after God’ conversations relying on God-absence.

Szasz refers to the legend of Ulysses overcoming the Cyclops by convincing a Cyclops to let him operate on his eye³³. Ulysses tells the Cyclops that his name is “Nobody” and then proceeds to blind rather than heal the Cyclops. When the Cyclops shrieks in agony, his fellow Cyclopes call to him asking what is wrong. The poor Cyclops, being blinded by Ulysses, responds that “Nobody is blinding me!” His fellow Cyclopes consider him crazy, resulting in Ulysses and company escaping (Szasz 1988: Loc.447/2364).

List 6.2.2.1 The success of Ulysses/Odysseus on a curious collection of events:

- 6.2.2.1.1 That the Cyclops understands his name to be “Nobody” and not Ulysses or Odysseus.
- 6.2.2.1.2 That the semantic structure of the Cyclops’ complaint is received by his fellow Cyclopes as “Nobody is blinding me!” rather than, “A man who calls himself Nobody is blinding me!” Using Ulysses name would’ve elicited a response from the Cyclopes while using “Nobody” in place thereof turns Polyphemus’ cry for help into the absurd. Alternatively, had Polyphemus cried out with the latter, it would have not sounded absurd. Here there is a clear connection between the language used and a corresponding response.
- 6.2.2.1.3 That the Cyclopes form the judgment solely based on the received report rather than checking in on Polyphemus in person. Had any other Cyclops looked for themselves, they would have seen the facts differing from the absurdity of Polyphemus’ cry as they receive and understand it.

The structure of the above argument applies equally to claims related to any non-empirical experience and any empirical argument available is taken to trump phenomena experienced in relation to the transcendent.

List 6.2.2.2 Szasz’s logic applied to the problem of God

- 6.2.2.2.1 When the point of departure is that God “is not” then any God-experience is considered absurd ‘*a priori*’ as the actual experience is already predetermined as being projection and pareidolia. The judgment has already been passed ahead of the exploration of the actual data. The phenomena of God-experience are simply not admitted.

33 In Homer's *Odyssey*, the Roman hero Ulysses is known by the Greek name Odysseus. The story differs only in that the drunk Cyclops Polyphemus is blinded with a wooden stake when passed out rather than when operated on.

- 6.2.2.2.2 Claims related to God-experience are, however, naturally tied to the approximation of sensory experience. Humans are, after, very much embodied. The result is that 'hearing' and 'seeing' are tensioned as analogous-yet-experienced against over-literalised. The result is that any meaningful appraisal or evaluation of such experience and phenomena become nearly impossible. As such the data is not admitted and excluded on the basis of the world(view) of Christendom already having been thrown out and therewith God-is-dead and all claims spurious and dubious.
- 6.2.2.2.3 The report of God-experience is, however, questioned not on the strength or legitimacy of the phenomena themselves but rather excluded on the '*a priori*' determination that any claims related to God "drawing near in person to speak and act" are predetermined as absurd. The result is that extroversive experience and practices are excluded as legitimate and therewith excluded from the exploration of mysticism. As such, the God-experience is not admitted to investigation, is predetermined as absurd, and so we never work out how to explore said data and distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate.

The result is that any exclusion of God-experience is not only unwarranted and absurd, but predetermined by our inherited worldview. This selection-bias is recognised by many wrestling with God-absence and -presence. Such a refusal to admit data is, in fact, "not scientific" on the basis of the demands for "scientific proof/evidence". This selection-bias is recognised by many questing for what mysticism 'is'.

List 6.2.2.3 Countering selection bias in modern thinking:

- 6.2.2.3.1 Klimo (1988:7) succinctly notes the breadth of data sources for extroversive experience of the Transcendent:

"Channeling, like mysticism, is a phenomenon that has been part of human experience as far back as human records go. It appears to be an essential element in the origins of virtually all great spiritual paths. It is not just a curiosity of current interest based on a resurgence of inner voices, visions, trance seances, and automatic writing. Rather, the phenomenon is an important aspect of human consciousness a crucial experience for human beings in all cultures and times, even though we do not yet understand its origins or mechanisms. As old as the phenomenon of channeling is, however, it has always been controversial ... because in examining channeling we are dealing with our underlying and often unconscious assumptions of the nature of reality."

- 6.2.2.3.2 Essentialism considers primordial theistic experience to be superseded by a-/non-theistic faith. Hollenback notes that this is a bias against extroversive experience with such being viewed as an “inferior type of mystical consciousness” (Hollenback 1996:Loc.119) which must be superseded by the introversive mysticisms. Hollenback views this as “unduly restrictive” and “ethnocentric” (Hollenback 1996:Loc.124). Hollenback notes that the mystic’s influences plays a role in how they perceive and interpret their experience and participate in the practice of their faith (1996:Loc.96) whilst noting that we’ve “paid less attention to the psychological mechanisms that cause this close fit between the content of the mystic’s experience and his or her underlying theological and mythological matrix” (1996:loc.99).
- 6.2.2.3.3 Krüger considers such a delimitation as unduly restrictive and seeks an idea-type mysticism inclusive of introversive and extroversive practice and experience (Krüger 2006:271). Krüger (2006:271) seeks to:
- “Include both the (hyper-)active and the extremely passive states of consciousness in the concept of ‘mysticism’. I (Krüger) also find that it is unnecessary to pitch the ‘constructivist’ and ‘PCE’ approaches flatly against each other, as Forman and his team do. They can be coordinated: the kind of topic addressed by constructivism/culturalism.”
- 6.2.2.3.4 Keener³⁴ notes that our modern epistemology is not just restrictive but holds an ‘*a priori*’ anti-supernaturalism as a criterion of authenticity. The result is the exclusion not only of the experience of Christ but also of scientifically and medically verifiable evidence supportive thereof, for instance of miraculous healing in the name of Christ.
- 6.2.2.3.5 Kuhn notes that we have ‘metaphysical paradigms’ or models. Here we find shared commitments to such beliefs, but such beliefs are not necessarily shared by scientists in different disciplines. For instance, chemistry in the 19th century did not require belief in atoms. We are then dealing with preferred or permissible analogies and metaphors (Kuhn 1970:184). Here the assumption of theism is “that God is” and that of Modernity “that God is not”.
- 6.2.2.3.6 Deer notes that the commitment to biblical objectivity as though Christianity is solely determined by the Scriptures without experience, is considered purely reasonable and objective. Yet, “the truth is, that we tow our brains around behind us to justify what we already believe” (Deer 1993:45). We all have reasons why we believe and do things, and our Scriptures are only some of these reasons. Sometimes our scriptures

34 In a public lecture in 2017 on his book *Miracles: The credibility of the New Testament accounts*, Volume 1 and 2 (2011)

ore religions are not even the primary reason for our beliefs or our practices, no matter how much we protest to the contrary (Deer 1993:46). Deere (1993: 55) says that:

"If you lock a brand-new Christian into a room with a Bible and tell him to study what Scripture has to say about healing and miracles, he would never come out of the room a cessationist. I know this from my own experience. Prior to my conversion at seventeen years of age, I had no training in theology, in the Scriptures, or in Christian history. Immediately after the Lord saved me, I began to devour the Scriptures. I read them day and night and memorized them. When I began to ask my newfound Christian teachers about the miracles in Scripture, I was taught that God no longer did these kinds of things through human agency. I was taught that the real miracle, the one that really mattered, was the conversion of the lost. Since godly people whom I respected told me this, and since I saw no miracles in my own experience to counter this teaching, I accepted it as true. I gave myself to evangelism and promptly forgot about praying for miracles and healings."

The primary reason why contemporary Christians do not believe in miracles is simply that they have not seen them and are taught that they no longer happen. And though no cessationist bases their belief on Scripture alone but relies on present and past history for supportive evidence. Cessationism is then an argument from the lack of experience (Deere 1993:55). People often hold to a cessationist position because that is the general consensus where they believe and live out their faith.

A second reason for not believing in miracles is because of the revulsion evoked by the misuse, or perceived misuse, of spiritual power in churches and movements. These are, however, personal and negative experiences rather than biblical reasons (Deere 1993:56). The result is that "the real or perceived absence of miraculous gifts is not an argument from Scripture, but an argument from experience" (Deere 1993:58).

Rollins (2012: loc.570/1969) notes that we are addicted to certainty and to belief in God and belief that God is not. As soon as we are free of the beliefs, whether "that God is" or "that God is not", we are then free to open to the im-/possibility of God.

As soon as we release ourselves from anti-supernaturalism we're free to explore the prevalence of *originating theistic experience*. It would seem that during the same period that many are highlighting the absence of God-experience that others are noting the prevalence thereof.

None of these authors can be faulted for not including God-experience. In fact, it would seem that Christianity is a faith in crisis, a faith in need of its own God after God conversations. In **Chapter 5: modern Christianity** we have explored Christianity as paradigmatically guided in faith and practice by Rationalism. And, as we all know, Rationalism is at odds with experience. The critique above is entirely valid wherever Rationalism is the foundation of Christian faith and practice and wherever such is disconnected from the relational presence of God.

To recognise this bias within the secular age is to recognise that there is a systemic ‘if not’ in relation to definition what spirituality, religion and mysticism ‘is’. This is partly due to the pluralistic context wherein different religions point in different directions. But it is also due to the pluralism within religions, meaning that anyone stepping forward to offer an ‘if’ is quickly beaten down not only by people of other faiths but also by people within their own faith category. Arriving at what mysticism ‘is’ requires overcoming the inherent biases and assumptions of Modernity characterised by the divorce between science and religion. And thereafter, overcoming the translation of religions from their expression in their respective sacral age to their respective expressions in the secular age. And then, one must also overcome the variety of a faith categories expressions within the secular age.

Such revelatory reports related to channeling, empowerment and the charismata as are dismissed before admission as data within the secular age. They have been predetermined as fictions and reports of such dismissed prejudiciously. Yet there is enough of them to cast doubt on the certainty of Modernity. We may not yet have a complete understanding of their neurological and social foundations but their continued contributions encourage a review of our Cyclopean dismissals. As modern people reported relying on data and evidence, we should not forget that such was available with regard to the geocentrism for around 1700 years prior to the Copernican Revolution. It was not the presence of the data but its acceptance that was key. Aristarchus of Samos offered a Heliocentric model of the universe in the context of Plato and Aristotle. Yet this new model was deposed based on the strength of argument and acceptance of the geocentric model. It is perhaps similarly then that the earlier “*ekklesia tou theo*” as the people who are religious without religion are absorbed into and develop the religion of the institutional Church as Christianity. Here a new model of being religious is replaced with the accepted model. Perhaps Rome’s greatest achievement over any people is its conquering and enduring reign over the Christians within its empire.

However, as explored below, the Christian claim is not to “revelation” as a property of Scripture and Tradition but rather to “the revelation as reported in Scripture” as marker or pointer to a specific some-One that is self-revealing or manifesting (*Šekînâ*) which means “becoming knowably or relational present”. That some-One can be known directly and immediately, and we can distinguish the reliability of such experience in relation to this revelation as distinct from a relationship that’s fideistic. If it were not for this phenomenological category, presently available and well reported in history, we could readily

reconstruct Christianity apart from revelation. However, given the prevalence thereof an investigation into originating theistic experience is potentially contributive to Christian spirituality and practical theology.

It would appear that humans have an innate spirituality rooted that's neurobiologically rooted in the very framework of the human being, yet the true substance of spirituality allegedly relates to God-absence. And it is in this God-absence that the Eastern and Western mystics are linked together through an inward journey where the true self is distinguished from the false self and engaged at the internal boundary to transcendence.

What spirituality, religion or mysticism 'is' can therefore not be connected solely with transcendent or divine Source(s). It appears that humans are capable of being spiritual when practices religion without the need for connection with a transcendent Person. In addition, our forebears needed religion more than our contemporaries due to their lack of knowledge and capacity for controlling their world and livelihood. It appears that humans have evolved cognitively and socially beyond the need for religious consolation and direction. Instead, we can develop an entirely this-worldly spirituality that's supported by our religious heritage and not tied to their beliefs just as easily as one that is not dependent on such.

It would appear that humans have evolved beyond the need for religion and theism. And even those participating in a theistic faith of some kind benefit from religions apart from the reality of their respective Source(s). And those that hold to their beliefs and precepts are being reviewed, with many God after God conversations fruitfully leading to transformed living whether in keeping or through abandoning traditional faith beliefs and practices.

Yet this God-absence relies on selection bias and fails to account for warnings against false prophets and false apostles in the long-standing Judeo-Christian faith tradition. In particular, let's be aware that (1) the recognition and admission of God-absence is confessional. Whether reading Kearney, Cupitt, Rollins, Krüger or Forman, we are exploring the confessional admission of those wrestling with theism and God-absence. And that (2) the review of God-absence is selection bias. Each author's focus on God-absence alone may be accepted as a selection bias guided by the secular world(view), for there are numerous claims that may serve as data. This does not, however, reduce their contributions. Instead, each shows us how faith and faithfulness is tied to commitment and, whether God 'is' or 'is not', people can live as inhibited or enabled by their faith.

We may model the self-revelation of spiritual beings as per *Diagram 6.1.2 Personal revelation* below. Here *Šekīnā* is properly reserved for God alone and personal revelation becomes a broad category. And both God and intermediaries are involved in personal revelation.

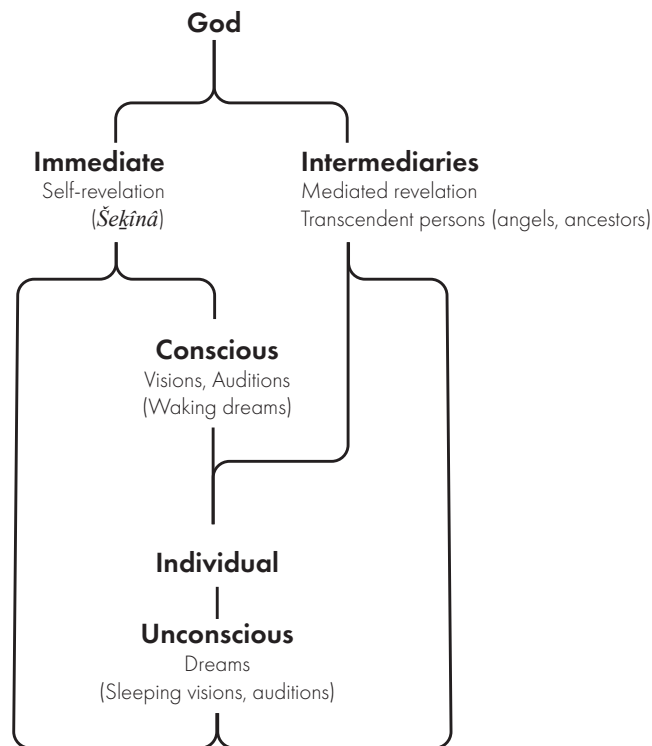


Diagram 6.2.2 Personal revelation

6.2.3 GOD-ABSENCE AND HERMENEUTIC CONTEXTUALITY

Krüger (2006:1) believes that:

“Religion has turned out to be the greatest disillusionment of all. The corruption of the best of the worst. You have come to a point where all the familiar pious words sound like inescapable, deafening noise. You are in need of silence. It is not about religion, at least not religion in an institutionalised sense.”

The postmodern person stands not within a world religion that has proven local with high ambitions, regional with global aspirations, and ethnic with the aim of ascending over all the world’s peoples. The various crisis related to religion and politics or economics are really all too human, as “manifestations of human crisis” (Krüger 2006: 26). The postmodern person stands not only after these religions in the aims of humans have failed in their sacral eras but also after the failure of our humanism in the hands of people. It is, perhaps, a “(non-)position” and an “in-between-ness” (Krüger 2006:7). “The way – the method – that we follow in these reflections connects the way of silence and the way of intellectually and academically informed speech and writing... and it speaks about mysticism” generally (Krüger 2006:5).

But this gap is not only one between religions but also between our experience of *Śūnyatā*, which includes “radical non-substance (*anatta*) and emptiness (*suññata*)” (Krüger 2005:22) and *Śekīnā* and the problems of language and meaning so well highlighted in Modernity. Yet the modern thinking is recent and evolutionary thinking. It understands there to be a problem and that the problem is hard to resolve for the insider wholly committed to their faith and the outsider to their non-faith. In essence, the problem lies not between the “real” and “non-real” but in the constellation of relationships and which star is central. Here our challenge is to get beyond our “belief for” and “belief against” as “conceptions we have devised about God” (Caputo 1987:268) in order that we may be “confronted then with the truly divine God (*der göttliche Gott*) who refuses to submit to this human nonsense” (Caputo 1987: 269). Here we are not making the “belief for” or “belief against” the focus as in the religions rooted in “an intellectual position we take with regard to the world, but a way of immersing ourselves in that world” (Rollins 2015:11). Our beliefs and unbeliefs are intensely and integrally related and show through in our behaviour (Rollins 2012: loc.494/1969). Here we instead can let go of whatever ideas we have about God “and ‘go after’ God again” (Kearney 2016: loc.17;/287). Here we can recognise a difference between the expression of the psychological need of our forebears for security and ourselves for meaning without having to choose one defined, historical and perspectival position or another. The postmodern can, perhaps, even simply agree with Lawrence that “Having found in many books different methods of going to God, and divers practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me than facilitate what I sought after” (Cosimo, Inc. 2006: loc.153/754). And having so agreed, forego all the world(view)s’ religions and practices and simply apply themselves to the pursuit of God – the post-modern *ana*-theist simply responds to the need, the thirst and want, and repeats the inviting, waiting and searching for God.

Diagram 6.2.3.1 Getting inside of the text (hermeneutic contextuality)

In the diagram above the atheist in the post-secular world(view) allows for contextuality to facilitate the interpretation of writings and events in the secular and sacred world(view)s. In each world(view) we access later through texts we must be aware of the transitions from metaphysics to rationalism to hermeneutics, of mystical theology to Scripture to exploration, of the transition in meaning of experience and the interplay with ‘*expérience*’, and of the shift from what is conceived as mystical experience to renewal to openness.

And though Cupitt moves to a non-realist view of God (Cupitt 2011: loc.890/2281) meaning that the ontological essence of God is that God exists only as an idea predicated upon human consciousness, Kearney’s *ana*-theism is a move “*forward* and not *backward*” as a return to God again and after the loss of God as real (Kearney 2016: 7). This is not to choose between the “belief for God as real” or the “belief for God as non-real” either. It is to recognise a split and conjunction between “*something* and *nothing* – between ‘being’ and ‘not-being’” (Krüger 2006:22). This too is “human nonsense” related to *Śūnyatā* and *Śekîṇā* and the conditionalism of our world(view)s and temporally complicit religions who make universal claims from what we recognise as precarious historical and geographic vantage points. It is, instead, to understand that our spirituality, religion and mysticism are interconnected. Yet what has lain at the forefront of the constellation has been the religions. With them falling down we have replaced our religions with humanisms, only to have them come crashing down and threatening to take them with us. With modern science, and Essentialism, our spirituality as embodied and practiced comes to the fore. But again, this focuses on the human side to such an extent that it comes to eclipse both the religion and the mysticism. Our hermeneutic contextuality then recognises a problem with the constellation of spirituality, religion and mysticism and aims to recover the mysticism that is lacking in our religion and spirituality. Our mysticism and religion are “vitally connected” (Krüger 2006: 9) along with our “meditation” (Krüger 2006: 10) taken to mean through the filter of Essentialism as our spirituality. And our contextuality must become a *con-text-uality* (*context/-uality*) and serve as a *text* alongside the literature texts we draw from for our '*lectio divina*' as incorporating reflections and meditations. By this we mean not only that we read the great literature *texts* but also the *text* of our lives, of our times, and of our relationships. Here we engage in a slow reading not only of the *text* but as allowing the *text* to read ourselves.

The hermeneutic *context* and hermeneutic *contextuality* is then about conjunctions and disjunctions and about discernment and wisdom for living rather than the historical and personal accruals and acquisitions. We may, perhaps, consider *Diagram 6.1.3.1 Hermeneutic contextuality* above. Here the understanding of their conjunction and disjunction is such that we incorporate: (1) the radical non-substance (*anatta*) of our religions as world(view)s; (2) the Emptiness (*suññata*) of the individual; and (3) our mysticism as including the transcendent, from our perspective, as impersonal, unknowable and substantially non-existent (*Śūnyatā*) and personal in the sense of drawing near in Person in order to know us and be known by us (*Śekîṇā*).

We are then, in terms of conjunction and disjunction, trying not to get to the relationship between religions and mystics *concepts* and their *referents* as the impersonal and personal transcendent but also to the *relational engagement* and *evolution of the individual* in light of the impersonal and personal transcendent. These concepts are, however, broad and require no small amount of research. The *anatheist* as *anamnethēist* seeks to recover the personal transcendent and prioritises relational engagement therewith.

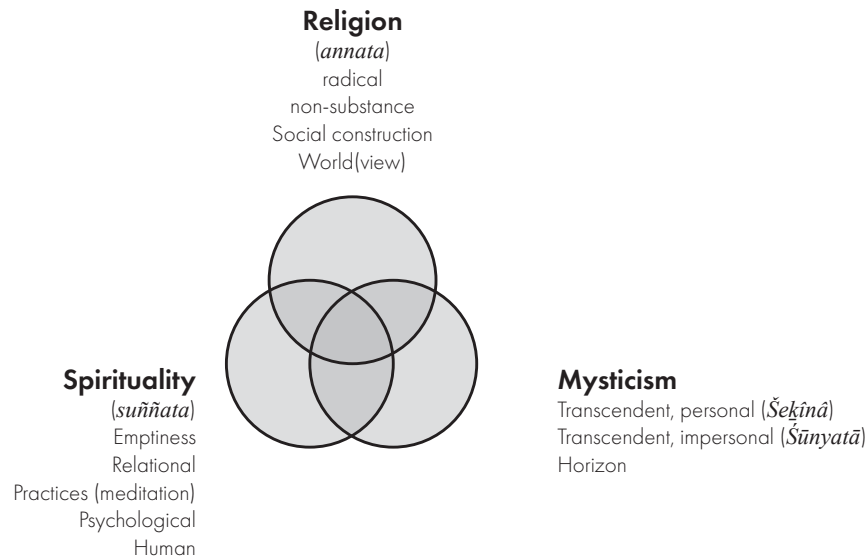


Diagram 6.2.3.2 Hermeneutic contextuality

6.3 CONJUNCTIONS AND DISJUNCTIONS

Anatheism encourages a *deep retrieval* (cf. Caputo) or *inner text* (cf. Cupitt) understanding of the relational presence of God. Such an exploration lies properly beyond the scope of this dissertation, but we can make a beginning thereof. Such a retrieval differs to the realistic view of dogmatic theology which is rationalistic and disconnected from the experience of God. Yet it differs in that it both agrees and disagrees with the non-realist view of God. Here we can recognise that God may serve as an idea or ideal and as projection. Yet as such may prove to stand between one and relational engagement with God (as fideism) or as enabling a pursuit of *Christ* akin to what is reported in Scripture.

6.3.1 THE “EKKLESIA TOU THEO” AND THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH

Christianity may be recognised as a banner term for a bewildering complex, diverse and nuanced collection of formally constituted and managed communities that share in common an historical anchoring in the Jesus-event and His early followers. But the word “church” is inextricably bound with Christianity. Yet it is used imprecisely as “an architectural structure, a building... a particular body of believers... a denomination, a group set apart by some distinctive” (Erickson 1985: 1026).

The question of what the church ‘is’, or what the “nature” of the church is, follows late after the Copernican Revolution and Reformation in the 16th century as a recent 20th and 21st century phenomenon. Many are convinced that the institutional expressions of Christianity have long departed from their “biblical roots” (Viola 1997: 36) and are “seeking new ways to renew and reform the church” (Viola 1997: 88). These reflect the calls that led to the Reformation of the 16th century. There is the recognition that the “first churches were simple Christian communities; legally speaking, most of today’s churches are corporations” (Jacobson 2016: 9). In fact, Halverson (in Jacobsson 2016:8) notes that:

In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centering on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America, where it became an enterprise.

The key difference perhaps lies between the church as “*persona ficta* or fictitious person” that “exist[s] in perpetuity” (Jacobson 2016: 161) and incorporates people into itself (Jacobson 2016:164) and as the people in whom God is present in the world(view). The images of the church in Scripture include “the people of God” (2 Cor. 6:16). “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27), and the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 19) (cf. Erickson 1985: 1034-1041). We recognise that though the institutional church defines the church in the same manner, that these images are transposed onto the institution of the church. And herein lies the problem. To deconstruct the institution of the church is often taken to speak against the church as the people of God. With the church following on from Pentecost it is inextricably personal and ties the relational presence of God (*Šekîṇâ*) to people. The later establishment of the formal or institutional church following the Edict of Thessalonica (380) results in a conjunction between the ‘*ekklesia*’ and the institutional church. *Anamnethēism* encourages us toward a disjunction between the institutional church and the ‘*ekklesia*’ and therewith a recapturing of the presence of God (*Šekîṇâ*). All present-day branches, expressions and versions of the institutional church are rooted in the continuity between the ‘*ekklesia*’ as established by Christ (following Pentecost) and the Edict of Thessalonica (380) where the formal institution of the church comes to define Christianity. And as such, *anamnethēism* is thus post-Christian and pre-Christian. For if Christianity is defined in relation to the institutional church then its a return to what Christianity ‘is’ before the institutional church and therewith ‘is’ after the institutional church. To speak of the church as constituted in relation to the presence of God (*Šekîṇâ*) rather than the institution encourages a review of the conjunction and disjunction of God’s relational presence to the institutional church and what is offered as modern Christian spirituality.

6.3.2 CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AND CHRISTIAN REFORM

The calls for the reformation of the church is a complex process within Christendom that culminates in the third great schism of Christianity. It took place when mounting calls for reform amounted to nothing only to steamroll first under Martin Luther (1483-1546) in 1517 and then in Geneva under John Calvin (1509-1564). Western Catholicism later reformed within as the Counter-Reformation beginning with the *Council of Trent* (1545-1564) and continuing through the *Patent of Toleration* (1781) and onwards to the *Second Vatican Council* (1962-1965) which defines Western Catholicism as it is today.

The Protestant Reformation is, however, the culmination of a grassroots call for Reformation. And it is appraised, in retrospect, as a Magisterial Reformation where the governance of the institutional church transitioned from Christendom and the Christian-Aristotelian world(view) to the modern world(view) and Reason. Yet as both Catholicism and Protestantism, it is Christianity ‘after’ Christendom.

The Reformation was enabled by numerous contributions and is itself at least three diverse streams that continue in the present.

List 6.3.2 Three streams of the Reformation

- 6.3.2.1 **Magisterial reformation.** The reformation is really a *Magisterial Reformation* wherein the institutionalised expression of Christian continues after Christianity as the church now under the leadership of Rome as Catholics and the Scriptures as Protestants. At its core, the Magisterial Reformation draws on already proven reforms only to retain the institutional understanding of the church.
- 6.3.2.2 **Social reformation.** The *Social Reformation* is a critique of and uprising against the Reformation, which lost out to the Magisterial Reformers who remained rooted within a hierarchical world(view). The renewed call for Reformation by the likes of Viola is, perhaps, in keeping with the social reformation and the kingdom of God becomes about social justice in this world(view) in and through institutional structures.
- 6.3.2.3 **Spiritual reformation.** The *Spiritual Reformation* asks what had really been accomplished with the Magisterial Reformation and wrestles with what Christianity ‘is’. It looks to the contributions of the Christian mystics leading into the Reformation. Thereafter the Magisterial Reformation is quickly critiqued by Pietism following by a number of Awakenings/Renewals. These have, however, to date not successfully Reformed from the paradigm of the church .

The mystics from around 1300 to around 1500 were enormously influential in encouraging the Reform of Christianity in Christendom. These include mystics from Germany, Netherlands, England

and Italy (McGinn 2005: ix) who contributed many of the reforms incorporated into Catholicism and Protestantism today. McGinn explores the question of whether the reformation marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern Era or whether it was a co-contributor alongside the Renaissance (McGinn 2016:1-3) and related calls to reform the church since the 1400s (McGinn 2016:4). McGinn (2016:11) notes that:

"Most of the movements associated with what has been called Catholic Reform were bottom-up, feeding off religious developments that began in the fifteenth century, such as the modern Devotion (*devotio moderna*) and various renewals of the religious orders. In the sixteenth century, Catholic Reform is especially evident in the genesis of new forms of religious life designed both to correct the abuses found in established religious orders (e.g., the Capuchian reform of the Franciscans) and also to initiate new ways of living the gospel in the world. The most important of the latter was the formation of the Jesuit Order between the time of the conversion of Ignatius Loyola in 1522 and the order's gaining papal approval in 1540... [yet] Ignatius' original aims were apostolic and spiritual, even mystical in nature."

McGinn understands mysticism to be more significant and present within modern Christianity than his exploration is able to demonstrate (McGinn 2016:x). This is partly complicated by the rejection of mysticism by Christians, with Adolph van Harnack (18150-193) noting that "Mysticism as a rule is Rationalism worked out in a fantastical way, and rationalism is faded mysticism" (in *History of Dogma*, around 1885-1900). Protestantism opposed mysticism "based in part on an inadequate view of the mystical element of Christianity, taking it as a monolithic phenomenon based on 'mystical union' (*unio mystica*) conceived as a mingling of God and the human creation" (McGinn 2016:4).

In a sense, the *unio mystica* is not present among or accepted and developed by Protestantism. Nor do we find mystical visionaries demarcating the classic process of illumination, purgation and union as mainstream forerunners within modern Christianity. This is understandable with the reformation resulting in questions of certainty - how to be saved, how to read the Bible, how to locate the true church - central throughout doctrinal quarrels from the 16th century onwards (McGinn 2016:15).

But when Christian mysticism is taken not as a continuation of and argument for mystical theology but as the desire for relational engagement with God, then we have a hermeneutic tool for identifying Christian mysticism whether it involves a mystical theology or not. Within Christendom the monastic was schooled into mystical theology and expressed their relationship with God through the language and world(view) they were situated within. However, modern Christianity has no mystical theology. And therefore, the link between pre-modern and modern mystics lies not in their sharing of a mystical theology but in their mutual desire for the relational presence of God. The result is a tension between

the mystics and Christendom leading into the Reformation and thereafter first between early modern individuals and later movements focusing on the relational pursuit of and engagement with God.

When Christian mysticism is not confined to monasticism and mystical theology and therewith phenomenally gifted thinkers pursuing union with God and encouraging others to do the same, then Christian mysticism can include poorer thinkers repeating such without the aid of a developed or developing mystical theology. Here Christian mysticism can be a mysticism without connection to the tradition of Christian mysticism and the heritage of thinking. modern Christian mysticism holds Scripture central and the Great Awakenings follow as God after God conversations within modern Christianity as a quest for what Christianity 'is'.

6.3.3 CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AND PROTESTANTISM

This is between a Christian mysticism without a mystical theology and the Christianity of the modern era. Our focus here lies with the Protestants and the mysticism of reformers seen as bringing Christianity to life in between periods where the institutional church is devoid of the love of God and corrupt and ineffective in the world.

Protestantism benefits enormously from the contributions of Christian mystics.

6.3.3.1 MODERN INDIVIDUALS

There are numerous contemplative individuals who stand out within the modern era, a few examples of early modern individuals are included here. This list is by no means complete.

List 6.2.3.1 Examples of modern contemplative individuals:

- 6.3.3.1.1 **Philip Spener** (1635-1705) coined the phrase 'pietism' in *Pia desiderai* published in 1675. Spener's thinking is surely representative of the Reformation while ahead of its time. During a similar period many others contributed a critique of Christianity following the Reformation and offered practical solutions. Nevertheless, Spener is among those deconstructing Christianity and wrestling for what Christianity 'is'. Pietism may be seen as quickly following on from the Magisterial Reformation as evidencing that the desire for God, that God-hunger, is not addressed. Instead, the Reformation produces a Christianity that continues with the absence of God and with meeting about rather than with God.
- 6.3.3.1.2 **George Fox** (1624-1691) developed an experiential approach to Christianity that became the Quakers and includes the practice of silent worship. Though not a numerically popular movement today, it is an early movement that structured for the relational presence of God. It is an example of individuals practice of waiting on God

together. It too is a wrestling for what Christianity 'is' as seeking to meet with God rather than only about God. It is also but one movement among many. These, and those that encourage an experiential faith likewise address the God-absence within people whose faith is constructed around the absence of God.

- 6.3.3.1.3 **Nicholas Herman** (1614-1691), known as the Carmelite Brother Lawrence, was well known for his relationship with God. *The Practice of the Presence of God* is well read today. Lawrence is interesting in not being a learned monastic and does not argue with the sophistication of an academic mystic. Nevertheless, in a world wrestling for what Christianity 'is' it is evident that something thereof was recognised far and wide in Lawrence. And people are still drawn to Lawrence for insight into the relational presence of God.

These individuals³⁵ are perhaps early modern and wrestle not with the philosophical developments in Western thinking but with the problems present in Christianity now as Catholicism and Protestantism. Their reading of the Scriptures encourages a quest for what Christianity 'is' and they arrive at the relational presence of God along with the mystics preceding them in Christendom.

6.3.3.2 MODERN MOVEMENTS

In addition to the contemplative individuals above there are large-scale happenings within modern Christianity tied directly to the immediate presence of God. These are all enabled by Modernity and by the movement of people in the modern era.

List 6.2.3.2 Modern awakenings

- 6.3.3.2.1 **The First Great Awakening** (1730-1755): Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), George Whitfield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791) led the First Great Awakening throughout the thirteen colonies predating what is now North America. They built on the foundation of Puritanism, Pietism, Anglican Orthodoxy and Presbyterianism to transcend denominational boundaries and emphasised the providential outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- 6.3.3.2.2 **Second Great Awakening** (1790-1840): Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) is considered the father of modern revivalism. The primary movement was through England, Scotland and Germany. Contemporary dispensationalism, Adventism, restorationism, as well as the Holiness Movements find their roots within this historical period.

35 There are certainly numerous other individuals that may be explored. Yet these individuals represent the desire to satiate God-hunger (Spener), the intentional practice of pursuing God in community, and the individual knowing God and living as beacon to others.

- 6.3.3.2.3 **Third Great Awakening** (1855-1930): The result was the Social Gospel Movement, the Holiness Movement, the Nazarene Movement, and Christian Science. The abolition of slavery is linked to this Awakening.
- 6.3.3.2.4 **Fourth Great Awakening** (1960-1980): Though not universally recognised as a 'great awakening', revivals during this period include Pentecostalism, the Charismatic Movement, and the Empowered Evangelicals. Each can be differentiated from the other but share in common the pursuit of an immediate engagement with God. Overall these movements contributed toward the ecumenism of the last century and the empowerment of lay/non-professionals as leaders in the institutional church and mission.

These movements cover the full range of the modern period after the individuals preceding them. They are, in effect, a large-scale expression of mysticism in relation to *Šekînâ*. Here we have contemplative preachers as people who have stood in the presence of God now preaching to others. They call people out of the world(view) divided between secular and religious. And they call people out to become the 'ekklesia' from among people who are church-goers and among those that are not. Here we see a clear tension between the institutional expression of Christianity wherein the church is necessary and the Word of God sufficient and the relational presence of God. modern Christianity as Protestantism may be seen as divided or conflicted over the relational presence of God.

In *Diagram 6.2.3.2 Time line of Renewals* in the modern era of Christianity we note the schisms of the institutional church and the recent expression of what is considered as the renewal of the institutional in the secular age.

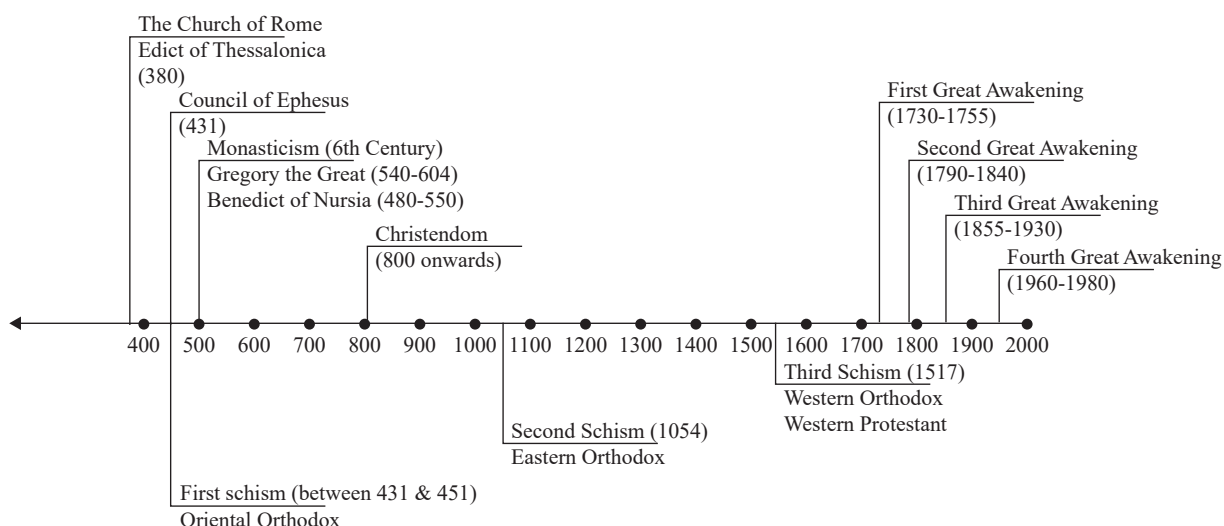


Diagram 6.3.3.2 Time line of Renewals in the modern era of Christianity

6.3.3.3 THE DUALISTIC MYSTICAL STATE AND THE CHRISTIAN

There is certainly a shared introspective practice among the world's religions wherein meditation plays a prominent role in the maturation of the mystics. We may thus accept meditation as an authentic and essential component of mysticism. Yet limiting mysticism to such alone is problematic, in particular because the notion of 'revelation' as in *Śekīnā* is rejected and replaced with a subjective and conditional interpretation of an experience. Yet, according to Shear (2006: xiii) the practice thereof is diverse.

"In modern English, the word "meditation" denotes two distinct types of mental activity. The first is that of thinking deeply about some topic. The second is that of practicing a procedure to allow the mind to leave all thoughts behind, experience its own inner source, and emerge refreshed, revitalised, and even transformed. This book is about 'meditation' in the latter sense."

In this sense Shear's exploration of mysticism helps differentiate meditation as the pursuit of *Śekīnā* as differentiated from *Śūnyatā*. And though Christians make equal use thereof we cannot reduce the Christian experience to Emptiness alone. The *Śekīnā* plays a prominent role not only in Scripture but also among contemporary Christians. Here, by way of example, we may consider a wide range of reports as data and leave epistemological concerns till later consideration.

Shear (2006L xvi-xvii) notes that there are significant differences in how meditation is used:

"Thus traditional meditation procedures can differ with regard to the mental faculties they use (attention, feeling, reasoning, visualization, memory, bodily awareness, etc.), the

way these faculties are used (effortlessly, forcefully, actively, passively), and the objects they are directed to (thoughts, images, concepts, internal energy, breath, subtle aspects of the body, love, God). They also often differ strongly with regard to how they relate to questions of belief. Some systems emphasise the need to hold particular philosophical, metaphysical, and/or religious views; others emphasise complete independence of all matters of belief. Different meditation traditions also often have very different goals, ranging from physical health and mental well-being to harmony with nature, higher states of consciousness, and experience of God. In short, even cursory knowledge of the many different mental activities, objects, contexts, and attitudes used by the world's major meditation procedures makes it clear that it is a mistake to regard all these diverse procedures as being essentially the same.

Recognizing these differences is thus essential to understanding the procedures themselves. It is also necessary to understanding the significance of the considerable body of research on meditation.”

When contextualizing meditation we may agree on the contemplative universals with regard to the individual's maturation and consciousness but such does not, inherently and of necessity, exclude *Śekîṇâ*. Here the Constructivists request that we responsibly interpret the great mystics rather than commit eisegetical crimes, the reading into the text of what we believe it ought to say. Here the Essentialists encourage us to go beyond the comparison of texts and experiences reported therein that may be interpreted as the same (Forman 1999:48). We may interpret the Personal Consciousness Event as a neo-Advaitan confirmation of *Samādhi* (Forman 1999:47-48). This does not immediately discount the experience of Christian mystics on the basis of such experience also being reported by them. In a similar sense to which Forman's neo-Advaitan experience confirms *Samādhi* so too does the contemporary Christian's experience of the Holy Spirit perhaps confirm *Śekîṇâ*.

There are numerous sources for the investigation of *Śekîṇâ* today. Some of these are noted in publications with the practice of “waiting on God” in Vineyard Churches (<https://vineyard.org/>), the New-Wine Movement (<https://www.newwinemovement.com/>), and the Alpha Course (<https://www.alpha.org/>) contributing a broad and balanced practice that we may investigate further.

This practice is presently used as a support for the Christianity of Modernity, but as the essential practice is mystical it may be tied to followers of Christ preceding Christianity as Orthodoxy, Monasticism, Christendom, and more recently within the modern Era as Catholicism and Protestantism.

6.3.4 SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Christian mysticism as synoptic differs from Christian spirituality as modern based on whether the inter-locutional point of departure and return is the relational presence of God wherein the contemplative as monastic or preacher reflects Christ or the goal is the pursuit of Christlikeness in character and as formative spirituality. By 'locutional' here we have in mind 'locution' as in hearing the voice of God whether audibly or within the inner-senses. This is, however, not limited to hearing alone but to the full range of human senses.

Both Christian spirituality and Christian mysticism have in common the practice of withdrawing to solitude and resting, reflecting and meditating in silence. And both share an understanding of God's silence and absence, but the role thereof is remarkably different.

In Christian mysticism there is an understanding that God is to be sought not as an idea and not given life as psycho-social construct, but as a Person. For each of the mystics and preachers mentioned above speak of God not as symbolic appreciation of a personal consciousness event (cf. Forman) or a deep perception of *Śūnyatā* as the *Emptiness* of the self, but as the inner silence and emptiness wherein God speaks. This is the inner silence and emptiness where the mystic arrives as freed from the world(view) and the social self as defined by, within, and in relation to their world(view).

Christian mysticism holds to relational engagement with God as locutional point of departure and return. The silence and solitude of the mystic is the locutional point of departure and return intersecting with the God's absence and presence and God's silence and voice.

What sets Christian mysticism apart from formal Christianity and Christian spirituality, even modern contemplative spirituality is the role of experience. And this is not just any experience, say the experience of God in relation to God as idea. It is instead experience in relation to God as a Person and therefore a relational experience and a relational spirituality. Here the experience of God breaking into the life of the mystic-to-be defines and provides a benchmark for God's voice and presence. And through 'askesis', modern devotion or '*lectio divina*' service to others in and beyond the church, they are tuning into the presence, activity and voice of God. These in turn become points of exploration and pursuit that stand as less important and meaningful apart from the locutional presence of God. Here the mystic and mystic-to-be undertakes an inner and inward journey distinguishing their hidden self from their social self. Here the authentic self is both the hidden and social self in relation to oneself, others and God. Yet in pursuing God they shed relational barriers in their lives to be with God.

Here we find the same elements of 'askesis', modern devotion or '*lectio divina*', and service in and through the church as mystics, believers and contemplatives. This results in a renovation of the heart for each and everyone and, to some degree, a measure of greater and lesser compunction enabling the processes of purgation and illumination and even union with God whether real or non-real. Yet it is not in the presence of these as habits or activities but their constellational configuration. The paradigm of

the modern contemplative differs to that of the mystic and mystic-to-be because the former is focused on character formation toward Christlikeness and the other on spending time with God.

Here Christian mystics differ from Christians as believers and church goers and those who go that bit extra to adopt contemplative spirituality. And though the latter contemplative may transition toward a mystic-to-be, this is not necessarily their goal. And in the church paradigm the real presence of God is collapsed entirely and mysteriously into Eucharist and Word of God apart from experience, meaning apart from relational pursuit and engagement. These activities which are all important to the church become useful but not necessary and can in no way be conceived as sufficient for the mystic. Where the relational presence of God is collapsed so completely into the offers of the church by the church and God is known by faith, or rather known about, the mystic can include the Liturgy and Eucharist of Catholics or the Worship and Message of Protestants into their '*askesis*' as practices wherein they seek the relational presence of God.

Gregory the Great would recognise the Word as enabling a glimpse of God and the imitation of Christ as a necessary pursuit of God (McGinn 1994:52). Yet argue that the presence of the Spirit is God's immediate and internal relational presence (McGinn 1994:53). And therewith the mystic knows God relationally and experientially (McGinn 1994:58) making the faith as in the fideism of modern Christianity into something quite different to the faith of Gregory.

When considering the anatheistic or 'God after God' conversations we recognise that Cupitt's serves amnethistically and Kearney's and Caputo's anatheistically. But with the Christian mystics we discover that the anatheistic question is one that returns not only after Modernity but has returned before Modernity. Here the importance of solitude and silence in relation to the self plays out very differently between the believer and the mystic or mystic-to-be. Thus, an important nuance emerges in terms of how '*askesis*' is constellationally constructed within their world(view) as subculture within the world(view) of, say, Christendom or modern Christianity. For the believer is able to submit to religion and cognitively agree with all the creeds of the faith and all the practices and devotions while forgetting completely about God. The Christian theist as fideist and dogmatic theist can then practically stand as a practical atheist; the atheist as fideist and dogmatic atheist can equally stand as a practical atheist; the anatheistic atheist and anatheistic theist may, however, stand together as mystic-to-be to whom the question of God returns. As such, *anatheism* is an *anamnethēism* when considering Christianity mysticism. Where the absence and silence of God defines God for the believer it is God's relational presences that defines God's silence and absence for the mystic. And though both make use of solitude and silence in mimicking Christ, they make use thereof toward completely different objectives.

We then recognise a difference between the mystic's experience of God's silence and absence and their experience of their own self within that silence and solitude as compared to the believer. The mystic experience of such is in relation to God as having drawn near in Person. This results in a locutional departure from and return to God's relational presence. God's silence and absence evokes

a deep longing after God within the mystic and is locutionally defined by God's having been present, by God having spoken and by God having touched. The mystic as having known God as lovingly and reciprocally present, comes to recognise that there is nothing that can satisfy their longing for more of God's relational presence. And having come to realise this, they'll pursue God no matter the cost and are willing to do so not only to the end of their world but even to the end of their very self, transition from an outward contemplation in action toward an inner contemplation and moving between the two. And they'll later come to stand within their inner and hidden self within a solitude and silence as one having journeyed as far as they're capable to stand now stripped naked of their social self down to their hidden self as standing humble, vulnerable and expectant that God will draw near. And here there is nothing that can satisfy as substitute for this longing deep inside, no further point they can journey, and nothing else they can do or achieve or say or offer. Stripped of everything their spirituality transitions from a trade and counter-trade. They offer everything and are abandoned deeply by God and to God. They are defeated by love to return to love. And it is here that they speak of Silence speaking and of Nothing as everything and Love as truly indescribable. And it is here, standing in a deep silence that *Silence* speaks from beyond *Emptiness*, from beyond *Śūnyatā*, from beyond 'Nihilo'. In the thinking of Eriugena, *Silence* speaks from beyond *Śūnyatā* as *Šekînâ* and 'proodos', as coming forth from *Silence* and *Nothingness* to enfold the mystic into Godself, into *Śūnyatā* and 'Nihilo', as 'epistrophe' as returning to and as reclamation of the mystic into intimate, transcendent and eternal relational union. When leaving silence and solitude as having been returned, the mystic journeys as one forever redefined by a deep, intimate and abiding relational union having not only been radically impacted by 'proodos' and 'epistrophe' but as God relationally seated within the depths of their very self.

But as the believer has never experienced God's relational presence to begin with they cannot recognise God's silence and absence for the enriching poverty that it is. And how does the believer and speculative mystic evaluate silence? For the believer, God's silence is not defined in relation to God's voice or absence to presence or love to touch. For the believer's God is valuable only inasmuch as serving to enable, inspire, guide and discipline through faith as correlated by projection, coincidence and even pareidolia. Where absence and silence serve as important markers in the mystic's spirituality evoking deeper desire, such serves the believer as the solipsistic point of departure and return. We must recognise that for the believer, as typified here, that God has always been silent and absent and will always be. The believer's God is dead in the sense of the-death-of God as not only silent and absent, but as never having existed to begin with. This is not to say that the relationship is not real, but to recognise that God is non-real. God can then only be seen and heard indirectly through the mediation of the church and found by faith somehow and mysteriously as present in the Eucharist and Word of God. God's silence is however not the silence of one that has fallen silent, absence as one recognised as no longer present, love as no longer being shared. Instead, the silence of the believer's

God is that of a mute, deaf and absent idol birthed in faith and raised entirely within the heart and mind of the believer as imaginatively constructed, even if such a construction is accurate in relation to Word and Eucharist as faith-paradigms within the church. For the mystic relates to God as a Person even as the believer relates to God as an idea, and so we should perhaps speak of God with an upper case “G” for the mystic or even as nothing between as “ “ and a lower case “g” for the believer or replace it with a more accurate “idol”.

Thus, there is a locutional conjunction between Word, Eucharist and Contemplation as tied to God’s relational presence for the mystic. Therefore the mystic cannot be content with the Word as Eucharist alone or the Message as Word alone. The mystic will be left longing for God’s relational presence no matter how immersed and invested in Word, Eucharist and Contemplation. They will be found wishing for God to disrupt the monotony of such religious and contemplative life by arriving in Person, for they have been taken in by Contemplation and not taken on contemplation. And though the mystic’s virtuous habits may be mirrored by the believer, surely even yielding the Christlikeness treasured by the church as the fruit of character confirming discipleship and validating leadership. But their response to God remains untested. How will they respond when God draws near? Will they run and hide in fear and shame or stand before God in fear and shame? An absence-only faith finds contentment in church services and the services of the church to others and does not want for the voice, touch and presence of a God who is silent and absent. Here the believer may go to church to receive the Word of God as mediated by Eucharist and message and understands God to have been received and met with in faith and in faith alone rather than experience, and even that they please God by all their good works and are declared righteous in God’s eyes by their saving faith in Christ.

There is thus a conjunction between the Spirit, Scripture and the ‘*ekklesia*’ as the people of God found within the church for the mystic and yet a corresponding disjunction. Here the relationship is as a constellation where the brightest star completes the constellation and draws it together. Here it is God that defines not the church as necessary but God’s relational presence; not the Tradition or Scriptures as sufficient but only God’s relational presence; and not the Eucharist and Word as hosting the presence of God but only God’s relational presence as experienced in Person.

The believer differs to the mystic in that the church is primary whether Catholic or Protestant. In fact, the very notion of the ‘*ekklesia*’ along with everything associated therewith is transposed over to the church. This is because the church is viewed as Christ’s body in keeping with the Fall-Redemption paradigm perhaps more associated with the “fall” of Jerusalem and Rome and Christendom. Mystical theology is more in keeping with the primary meaning of revelation in revelation theology as the relational presence of God that the special revelation of Christian theology.

The challenge for the mystic lies in their own shift from a non-real relationship with God as fiction to a relational spirituality including God’s presence, meaning God as one who draws near and withdraws from the mystic. This shift is complicated for the *anamnethēist*. Here the Christ of

Christianity can easily be a projected Jesus predicated upon a personal world(view) itself predicated on a host and secular world(view) and a hosted and religious world(view). The non-Christian may be viewed as born (natural birth) into a world(view) and “born again” (spiritual birth) into the world(view) of the institutional church and here Christ is “received by faith”. The Christian may be viewed as born (natural and spiritual birth) into a family and church and later confirmed in the institutional church with the “saving faith” shifting from the parent to the child. Yet, neither parent nor child may experience the relational presence of God. Instead, such a “secondary experience” is considered unnecessary and undesirable. Such an experience sets the “faith” of the mystic apart from the “faith” of the believer. How is the Christian raised in the world(view) of their family and religion to understand such an experience or make of it? Set within a modern world(view) where Christianity is defined by rationalism such an experience is not encouraged, sought or trusted. Here the mystic is assured that “feelings” and “experiences” are neither reliable nor enduring and therefore one shifts their trust to faith. We thus find a tension between Christianity as the host-world(view) to Christian mysticism as the hosted-world(view).³⁶

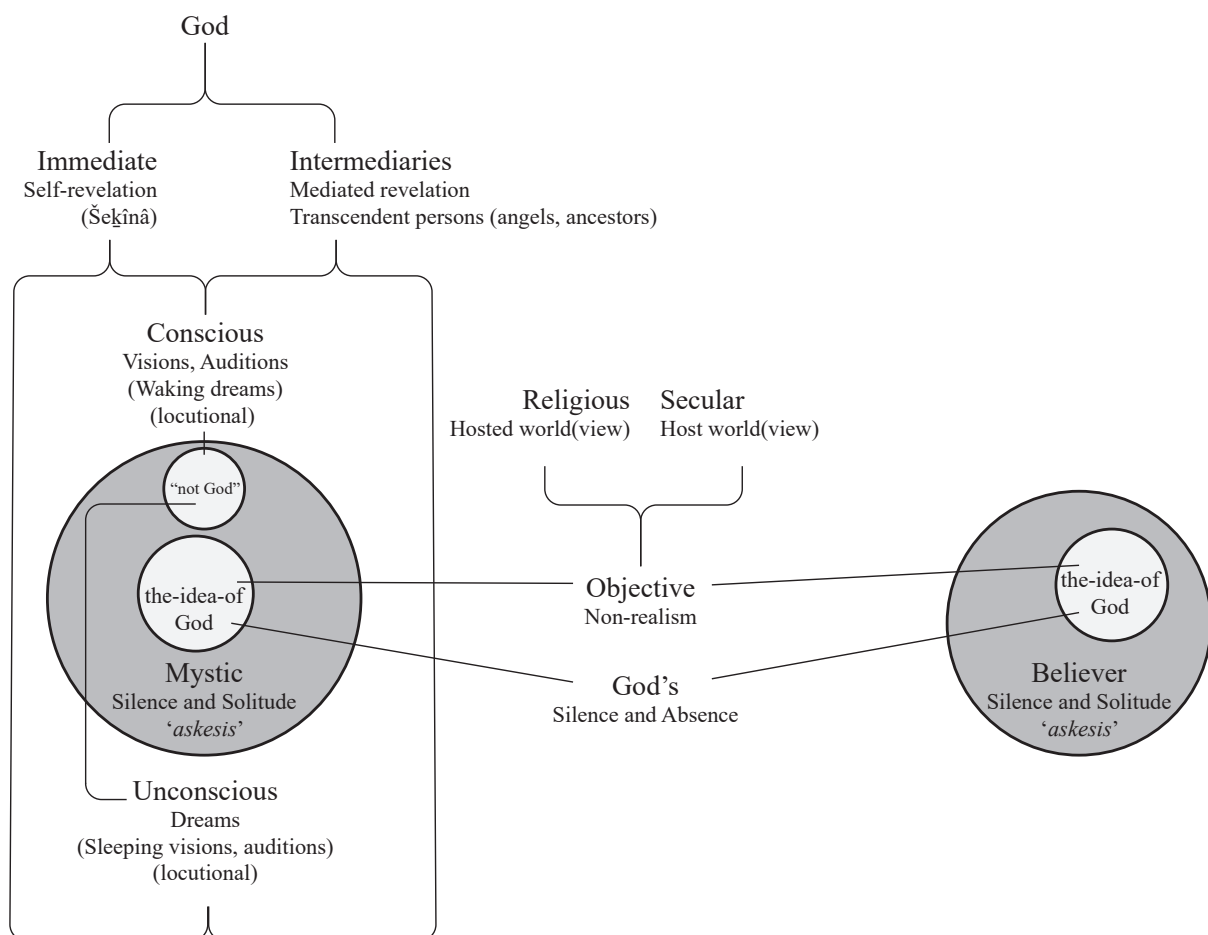


Diagram 6.3.4 Silence and solitude as practices for the mystic and believer

³⁶ There is certainly room to explore this in relation to Christendom as well as Catholicism and Protestantism. The reader is

In *Diagram 6.3.4 Silence and solitude as practices for the mystic and believer* below we visually represent the difference between believer and mystic as explored here. Here we note that God may be experienced sub-consciously and consciously in Person and through intermediaries. These may all fall under the banner of *Śekīnā*. Yet here there is a difference between the believers very real relationship with God understood to be real and the real relationship with the *Śekīnā* where God is understood as non-real. There is thus an interplay between real as non-real and non-real as real that is philosophically complex in relation to their experience as tied to ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’.

6.4 A PROPOSED MODEL

The ‘God after God’ conversations here include the philosophers, Essentialists, modern Christians, Christian mystics and anatheists. It recognises a difference between world(view)s, the complexity of religious diversification, and the return of the question of God anew and afresh of the modern era and Christianity as Catholicism and Protestantism therein. Yet it also recognises the difference between ‘spirituality’, ‘religion’ and ‘mysticism’. This leaves us with diverse and complex streams of conversation and thinking. Can we put them together?

Respecting the conjunctions and disjunctions we have all too briefly considered above, and the various threads explored in this dissertation, an anatheistic model is proposed below. It is both post-Christian and post-Buddhist in the sense that they are expressed variously in their respective sacral ages and the complex and plural secular age and modern era.

In *Diagram 6.4 Silence, solitude and the transcendent* below we attempt to do exactly that. We distinguish between: (1) the idea of God as existing entirely within the individual by faith and being itself non-real (*annata*); (2) the God of faith as distinguished from the becoming present of God (*Śekīnā*) and experienced through the internal senses; (3) the various kinds of *Emptiness* in relation to world(view)s (*annata*) with associated institutions and ideas, the person (*suññata*), and the Cosmos itself as space-time continuum (*Śūnyatā*). In the latter case, the mystic there is an interplay between the idea of God and the relational presence of God. Here God’s silence and absence plays a similar role in the believer and mystic. Yet this also differs between the two as the locutional presence and activity of God establishes a contrast within the mystic. Therefore the importance of Emptiness in the Christian mystic (*Śūnyatā*) should not be taken to exclude the relational presence of God (*Śekīnā*) by the Essentialist.

likely well familiar with the tension between Christianity and the Awakenings within Protestant thinking and the controversy of the Revivals. These are rich grounds for further exploration.

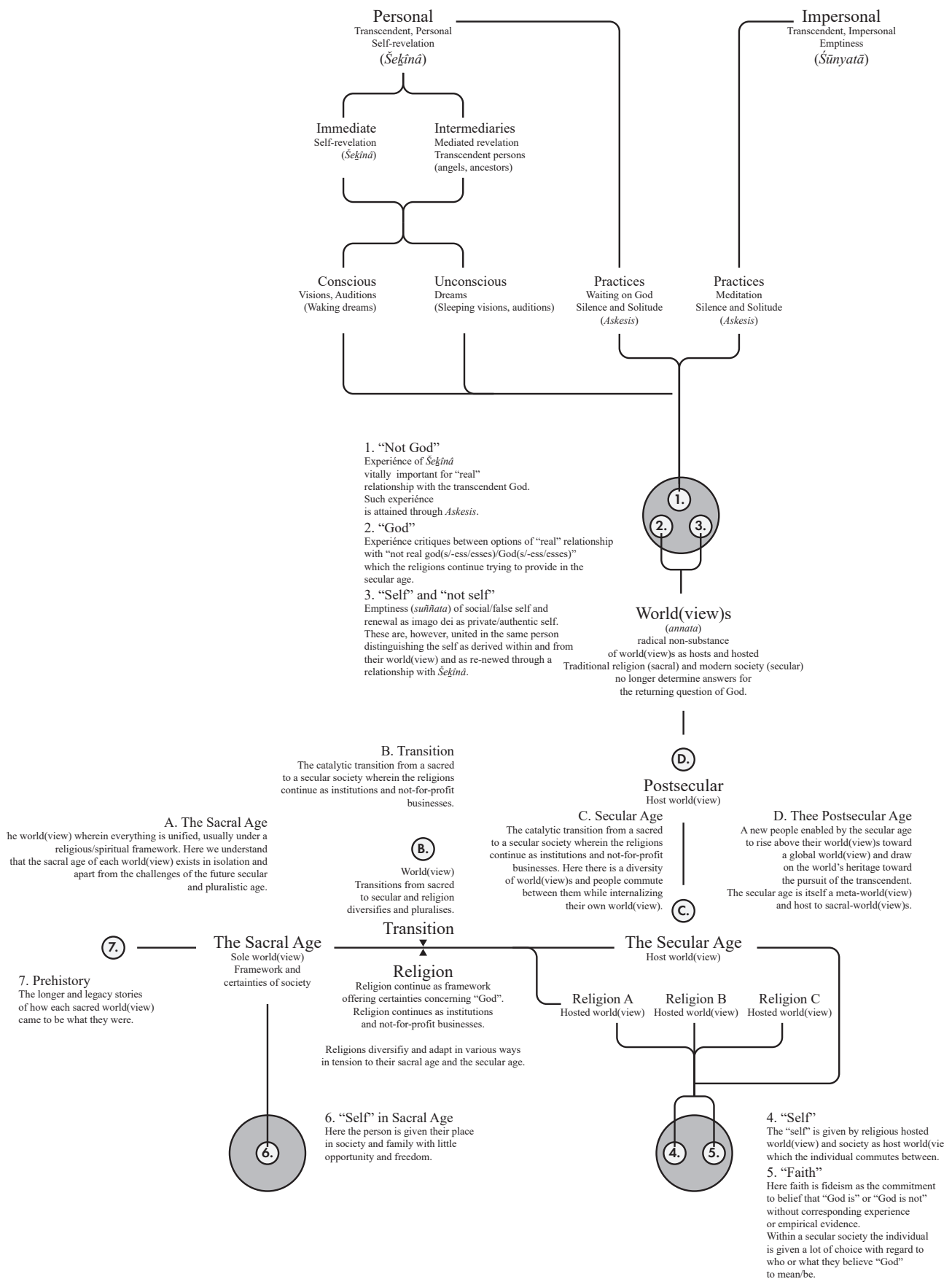


Diagram 6.4 A proposed model

6.5 CONCLUSION

Allowing the question of God to return on its own terms and afresh after the ‘God after God’ conversations offers an opportunity to integrate *Śūnyatā* and *Šeḱinā*.³⁷ It encourages us to leave behind the sacral world(view) of Christendom and the secular world(view) of Christian rationalism to recover what Christianity ‘is’ as tied to the relational presence of God (*Šeḱinā*). We furthermore need not choose between the religions as constructed in the past and a secular atheism. We can instead distinguish between the institutional and experiential dimension within the religions and even secularism. And in embracing a first-person present continuous openness to the im-/possibility of God we can invite God to drawn near in Person. Here various ‘*askesis*’, as practices and habits, related to *Śūnyatā* and *Šeḱinā*, can be drawn on. This is particularly necessary as the recognition of Emptiness finds agreement between Eastern and Western thinkers. This itself enables an ancient-present critique of theism as fideism and encourages a post-Christian and post-Buddhist recovery of *Śūnyatā* and *Šeḱinā*. Such an integration is, however, not foreign to Christianity. A hermeneutic exploration of Christianity enables the recognition of *Śūnyatā* and *Šeḱinā* as long offered in Christian mystical theology.

37 Admittedly, this integration of ‘*Śūnyatā*’ and ‘*Šeḱinā*’ is likely to prove theologically controversial to those who seek to bolster and defend the legacy of the institutional church. But this is precisely the return to complexity and first-person engagement with the transcendent suited to those who already consider themselves as religious without religion atheists.

Inconclusion

This dissertation has been a thought experiment enabling us to build a model of spirituality, religion and mysticism for those to whom the question of God returns. It is intended to provide an orientation for those choosing *anatheism* as a third option, as not having to choose between a traditional religion and a modern atheistic secularism. Here various ‘God after God’ conversations have developed over time in relation to the-death-of God and following the divorce between science and religion in the Copernican Revolution. Yet the question of God returns again, afresh and anew on its own terms. And it returns to people who want-to-be a mystic today, who are often caught between the religious and secular and the gravity of the world(view)s. Here we have but begun to understand the complex conversations a mystic-want-to-be may become lost within. A new ‘God after God’ conversation is in the early stages and will need to dialogue with the ‘God after God’ conversations of the modern philosophers, Essentialists, and Christians. These all overlap and yet become quite specialised in terms of the problems they focus on. Yet those to whom the question of God returns today is after these conversations. This makes it a challenging question in that it is strongly challenged by religious and secular world(view)s, yet it challenges these world(view)s less than it challenges the want-to-be mystic.

In **Chapter 3: modern philosophy**, we developed an understanding of how we see the world and the world we live in becomes our world(view). This enabled us to develop a model of a world(view) and work toward accepting three key, and consecutive, world(view)s as sacral, secular and post-secular. Of vital importance is the understanding that religious world(view)s are not replaced in the changeover from sacral age to secular age, but instead diversify within the family and society. This provides a hermeneutic contextuality enabling a distinction between the expression of spirituality, religion and mysticism in the sacral, secular and post-secular age. Key developments in the thinking of modern philosophers draw on the-death-of God to develop a non-real understanding of God. This non-realism carries implications for our understanding of our selves, our world(view)s, and the Christian God-concept rooted in metaphysics and then in rationalism. This leaves us with the understanding that our God-concepts can play a significant role without our experiencing God as real. The ‘God after God’ conversations among modern philosophers help us understand that we can have a real relationship with a non-real God-concept, that we can relate to God as an idea.

In **Chapter 4: modern mysticism**, we explored ‘God after God’ conversations following the-death-of God in relation to the pluralism of God-concepts. We understand that early essentialism sought to understand religion as a phenomenon. Two trajectories develop from the work of the early

essentialists: (1) the Constructivists concerned with issues in the work and conclusions of the early essentialists; and (2) the Essentialists who identify shared practices and a shared experience common to theistic (personal) and non-theistic (impersonal) mysticism. However, the Essentialist collapse personal mysticism entirely into their understanding of impersonal mysticism. This is perhaps as confessional and biased as it is helpful. It is also, perhaps, fair in light of modern Christianity where notions of revelation appear to share more in common with Essentialism than distinguish itself as personal mysticism.

In **Chapter 5: modern Christianity**, we explored and modelled the Christian world(view)s and its development from consecutive eras and institutional expressions of the Christian faith. This enables us to understand how Christianity in Christendom relies on and is near synonymous with the Christian-Aristotelian world(view). Yet what Christianity is following Christendom is near synonymous with the rational world(view) of the secular age. Here modern Christianity succeeds Christendom as Catholicism and Protestantism. On the foundation of understanding the institutional church to be necessary for Christians is added the sufficiency of Tradition and Scripture respectively to Catholics and Protestants. Here the real presence of God is collapsed into the services and services of the institutional church, perhaps specifically the Eucharist to Catholics and the Word of God to Protestants. Yet this God is only accessed by faith in and through the institutional church and not relationally or experientially. The notion of God's Self-revelation (*Šekīnā*) becomes reserved for special revelation as tied to Tradition and the Word of God but not to one's practice of Christianity. And though a God-hunger is increasingly prevalent and the institution of the church challenged, in various ways throughout Christian history and today, these are sub-cultures within the broader faith. The faith is not paradigmatically defined by alternatives. It is, primarily, an institutional faith supported perhaps solipsistically and rationally. And though a modern spirituality is offered as drawn from the Christian mystics, neither their mystical theology nor their expectation of an immediate experience of God's *Self-revelation* (*Šekīnā*) is offered. Instead, it is only their practices that are taken as character formation toward Christlikeness. modern Christianity, as 'God after God' conversation, supports the Essentialist hypothesis.

In **Chapter 6: Anamnētheism**, we recognised three kinds of 'God after God' conversations under the umbrella of Kearney's *anatheism*: (1) *anatheism* as *amnetheism*, as the forgetting of God following the-death-of God and metaphysics; (2) *anatheism* as allowing the question of God to return, as recognizing the it returns anyway, and allowing it to do so on its own terms and afresh. Here there is no need to choose between a dogmatic theism rooted in a sacral age and world(view) or a secular anti-theism and atheism rooted in a secular age and world(view). Instead, one can pick a third option as repeating religion without religion; and (3) *anatheism* as *anamnētheism*, as remembering that God has been forgotten and recovered within Christianity and setting out to understand and do so as our selves without institutional reliance and support. In this latter sense we draw on the 'God after God'

conversations to enable a hermeneutic for drawing a model of spirituality, religion and mysticism that prioritises the individual in relation to the transcendent over the religions as conditional world(view)s. In *anamnētheism* we get past the religions to do it all again, afresh and anew.

The ‘God after God’ conversations are then one-part informed reflection as participant-observer in the Christian faith and another part a natural step toward a Christianity after the Christianity of the secular age as Catholicism and Protestantism. It is perhaps both foundationally secular and sacrally pluralistic in a way that may make sense as drawing together practices enabling relational engagement with the transcendent beyond ourselves and the horizon of our world(view)s as *Śūnyatā* and *Śekīnā*.

There is, literally, a world of difference between the diverse sacral world(view)s that precede their convergence in the secular age. Here a shift takes place from people living in a world that is religious and a world you retreat from to religious spaces and activities. We are challenged to understand this change and the implications thereof. We have had to develop a perspective that is broader than a single world(view) focused on the secularization of their religious world and the challenges of foreign religions. Here an understanding of world(view)s helps shift the focus to the development as a shared concern equally relevant to those who are religious and those who are not.

This work is informed reflection of someone seeking an understanding of the ‘God after God’ conversations in the secular age for those commuting between sacral, secular and post-secular world(view)s. It is for a person wrestling with the conjunction and disjunction between the ‘belief in’ and ‘belief against’ God and the absence and presence of God, yet who wishes to experiment through practices with themselves. Here a loose distinction was drawn between ‘spirituality’ as related to the individual, ‘religion’ as social institution, and ‘mysticism’ as related to the experience of the transcendent as ‘impersonal’ (*Śūnyatā*) and ‘personal’ (*Śekīnā*). The transcendent, and our exploration thereof, is here opened as *Śūnyatā* or *Śekīnā* to the individual through intentional practices, habits and a personal development (*askesis*).

Further work needs to be done. But at a basic level this has enabled us to propose a model including: (1) world(view)s, the transition from sacred to secular to post-secular in relation to world(view)s and religions; (2) and the real relationship between God as non-real and the transcendent as *Śūnyatā* or *Śekīnā*. This has enabled us to explore the absence of God following the-death-of God as carrying over into the thinking of modern philosophers, early essentialists, Constructivists and Essentialists, and modern Christianity as a kind of rationalism disconnected from the relational experience of God as God’s *Self-revelation* (*Śekīnā*). Yet in opening to the returning question of God within Christianity, it perhaps contributes toward developing a Christianity and Christian spirituality after modern Christianity.

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